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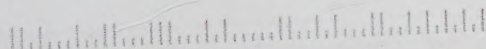
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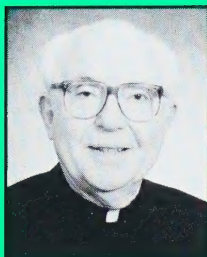
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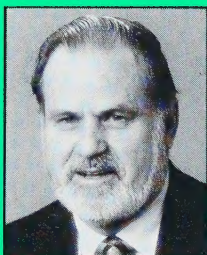




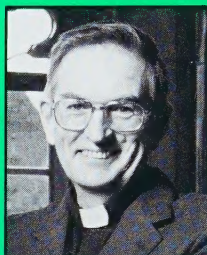
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., a priest and psychiatrist, serves as a consultant to the Institute of Living, the Harvard University Health Services, and religious congregations, dioceses, formation personnel, and spiritual renewal centers throughout the world.



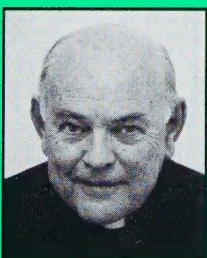
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Linda Amadeo, R.N., M.S., a nurse whose clinical specialty is psychiatry, is assistant director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality in Silver Spring, Maryland. She conducts workshops internationally on topics related to human development and women's issues.



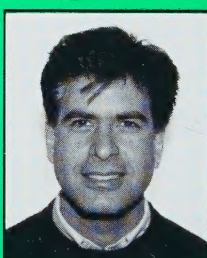
SENIOR EDITOR Loughlan Sofield, S.T., M.A., is a consultant to the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality in Silver Spring, Maryland. Brother Loughlan has conducted workshops on psychology and ministry in North and South America, Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia, and India.



SENIOR EDITOR William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D., a priest, author, spiritual director, and lecturer, is codirector of the Jesuit tertianship program in the New England Province of the Society of Jesus. He lives at Campion Center in Weston, Massachusetts.



BOOK REVIEW EDITOR Jon J. O'Brien, S.J., D.O., is a priest, lawyer, and physician, board-certified in psychiatry. He is staff psychiatrist at the North American College, Vatican City, and clinical associate professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Center, Washington, D.C.



ASSOCIATE EDITOR John J. Cecero, S.J., Ph.D., a priest and clinical psychologist, is a research fellow in the Department of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine in New Haven, Connecticut. He is conducting studies in the psychological treatment of substance dependence and is interested in integrating spirituality into the treatment of addictive disorders.

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Manuscripts should be submitted in triplicate to the Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, 8901 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20903. Copy should be typewritten double-spaced on $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ -inch white paper, 70 characters per line and 28 lines per page. Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 pages) with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Book reviews, which should not exceed 600 words in length, should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Jon O'Brien, S.J., D.O., c/o HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (for address, see above).

Unaccepted manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Editorial Office phone (301) 422-5500 / fax (301) 422-5519 / e-mail jesedcntr@aol.com

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EDITOR'S PAGE

MILLENNIUM FEVER SPREADING FAST

The end of a year traditionally draws our attention both forward and backward. Thinking about future possibilities, we make resolutions that we believe, if kept, will improve or enrich the seasons ahead of us. Looking back, we review the changes, gains, and losses that the past twelve months brought as they swiftly converted our lives into history. The American culture that guides our minds, particularly through the media, tells us that at year's end we should be recalling the best films, best athletic performances, best books, and most significant world events of the vanishing year. At the same time, the church invites us to join choirs in cathedrals and monasteries around the world to chant on New Year's Eve the *Te Deum*, in thanks to God for the gifts abundantly bestowed on us throughout the ending year.

We generally celebrate the final and earliest hours of every year in a festive way. We dine and dance, exchange warm wishes, and drink champagne with those we love. For most of us, it is a time for joy, affection, and hopefulness. But this year, if you listen closely, you are likely to hear the sound of a toxic virus gnawing its way into the minds and hearts of the revelers. While they are reminiscing about the past and speculating about the future, you will notice that suddenly people's thoughts will be switched by the hidden virus onto the topic of the millennium. Watch for the symptoms that appear at that moment: thinking becomes illogical, irrational, and disconnected from the person's life experience and education; feelings such as anxiety, hopelessness, and despondency can instantly wipe out his or her tranquility and optimism.

How is the Millennium Virus being spread these days throughout the nation's population? Just listen to talk shows on radio and television. Stroll through

bookstores, where you will find titles like Harold Bloom's *Omens of the Millennium*, Stephen J. Gould's *Questioning the Millennium*, and Mark Thurston's *Millennium Prophecies*. Visit the campus of Boston University and its recently opened Center for Millennial Studies, where this past week a hundred historians, medievalists, and theologians presented papers and conversed about end-of-time prophecies, the impact of apocalyptic tradition on the nuclear age, and the role that imagined futures play in shaping the present. On Sunday mornings, notice the frequency with which doomsday preachers link with the millennium the current economic and geopolitical instability of our world and its ever-increasing poverty, violence, and crime. These are some of the obvious ways the virus is spreading. You may even discover that your own thoughts, conversations, and feelings begin to reveal signs that you too have contracted the insidious virus that causes Millennium Fever.

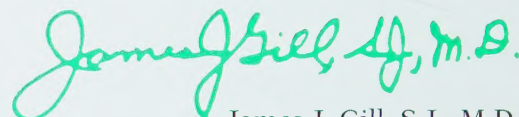
Fortunately, most of our readers know how to keep the Christmas–New Year season a time of peace and joy rather than let it be spoiled by worries about some catastrophic or apocalyptic event soon to be set off by the millennium. We who have access to the Bible and the church's teachings know that we have thousands of years of history to recall if we want to find convincing signs of God's constant love and care to support our confidence in the future. And we can all look back on persons, events, and situations in our own lives that have given us reassuring proof of God's ever-present kindness, generosity, and protection.

If you want to read a book that I consider the best available antidote to Millennium Fever, I would recommend James Torrens's *Reaching Toward God: Reflections and Exercises for Spiritual Growth*. Most of its contents, including his paired poems and essays, will be familiar to our readers. Torrens has regularly graced the pages of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT for seventeen years with profound, often brilliant, and

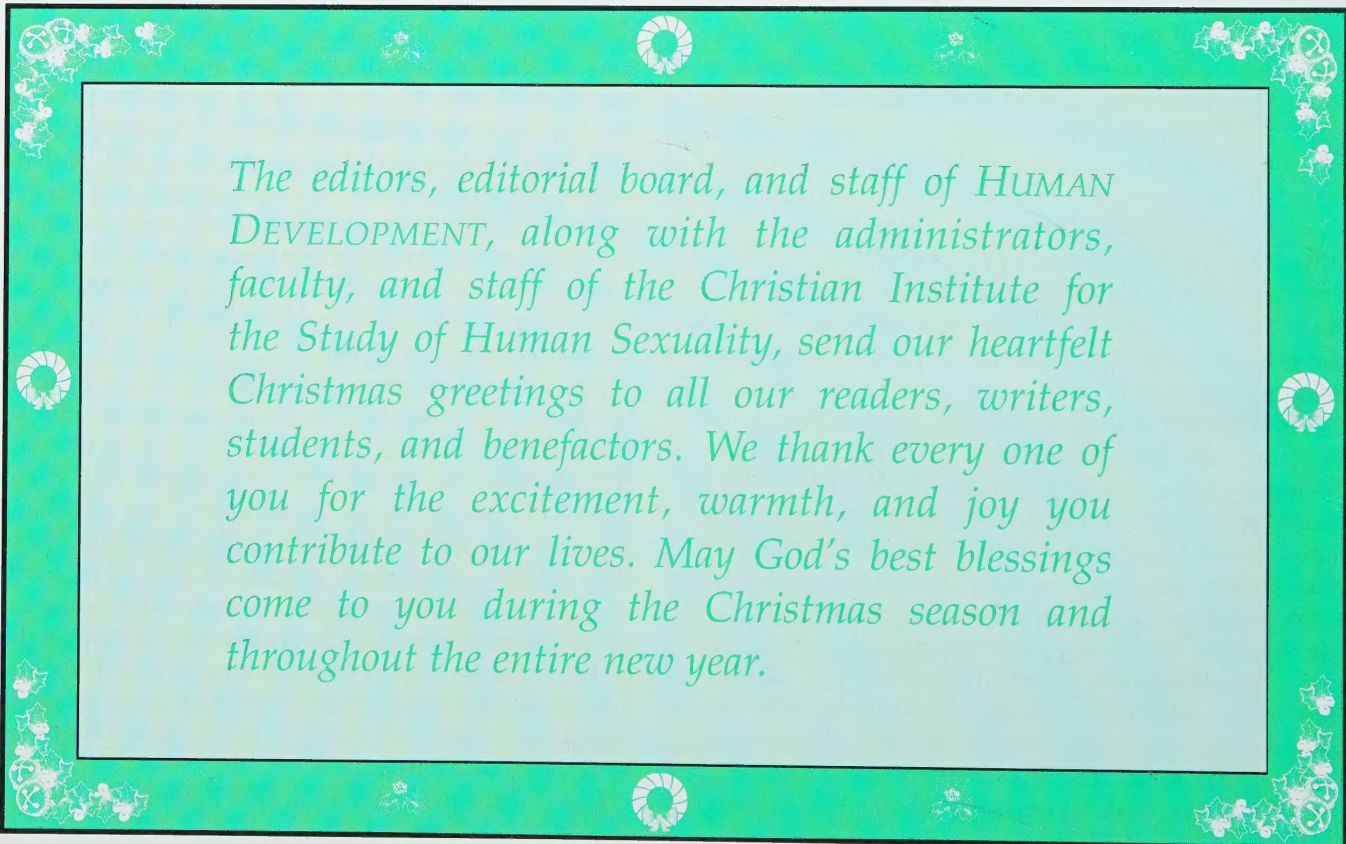
always heart-lifting writings that teach us how to find God, excitement, beauty, and love in our everyday experiences of family, friendship, work, travel, and community. Our board of editors extends sincerest congratulations to Jim Torrens for the publication of his book by Sheed & Ward. We are deeply grateful to him for honoring our journal so generously with the fruits of his spiritually moving insights and always humane reflections.

To close where I began, we are naturally inclined at the end of a year to focus our heart's attention backward and ahead. My hope is that this holiday season will give all of us ample time to both recall and anticipate. For our readers, my wish and prayer

is that in the still brightly burning starlight of Bethlehem, you will recognize in this past year a rich variety of God's blessings, which will strengthen your faith, gratitude, and love. And in view of these signs of our Creator's constancy and affection, may your trusting hope for God's guidance, grace, and protection carry you confidently through all the days of the new year that lies just ahead.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.
Editor-in-Chief



The editors, editorial board, and staff of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, along with the administrators, faculty, and staff of the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, send our heartfelt Christmas greetings to all our readers, writers, students, and benefactors. We thank every one of you for the excitement, warmth, and joy you contribute to our lives. May God's best blessings come to you during the Christmas season and throughout the entire new year.

Crucial Issues in Psychological Assessment

Luisa M. Saffiotti, Ph.D.

Over the past several decades in the United States, and increasingly in other parts of the world, seminarians and religious in formation have typically been required to undergo some form of psychological assessment. The nature/content of the assessment, the way it is viewed and approached by the formation team and superiors, and the use made of the assessment results continue to vary enormously across congregations and dioceses. In some settings, candidates complete exhaustive assessment batteries and interviews over several days; in other settings, candidates complete a personality questionnaire and an interview in a few hours. Sometimes candidates are given feedback regarding the main results of their evaluation, but often they receive no feedback at all. In some situations, evaluation results are integrated into the formation team's work with a candidate; in others, results are placed in a file and do not directly inform the formation process.

The experience of conducting psychological assessments with hundreds of religious, clergy, and candidates, as well as working with formators, superiors, and evaluatees to explain and integrate assessment results, leads me to address several issues that repeatedly surface. These issues seem to contribute to certain perplexities and misconceptions surrounding the enterprise of psychological assessment as it

relates to religious life, particularly the assessment of candidates. This article considers the perspective of those requesting assessment, the goals of psychological assessment, the nature of psychological tests, "screening" for pedophilia, cross-cultural issues in assessment, and the utilization of assessment results.

PERSPECTIVE OF ASSESSMENT REQUESTORS

It is of primary importance to become aware of the attitudes that formators and superiors bring to assessment. In my experience, the prevailing tendency is to want to know whether an individual is in some way troubled and thus a potential risk for the community or diocese. While understandable, especially in light of the current climate of anxiety related to the misconduct of church personnel afflicted with serious psychopathologies, this attitude often engenders an atmosphere of fear and diffidence that seeps into formation settings—especially seminaries—and significantly reduces the likelihood that assessments will yield the richest, most valid profiles of the candidates. Indeed, the dread of being dismissed from formation (or barred from entering) based on the outcome of psychological assessment is one of the factors most responsible for producing a defensive approach to tests and interviews. It sharply reduces the amount of

The dread of being dismissed from formation (or barred from entering) based on the outcome of psychological assessment often produces a defensive approach to tests and interviews

useful information obtained and generally keeps essential information (such as history of sexual abuse or other trauma) out of the picture. Inevitably, that missing information later becomes a prominent, though typically covert, influence in the life of the candidate—and, thus, of the community.

An alternative mindset among formators and superiors is that the purpose of assessment seeks to discover patterns of strengths and weaknesses in a candidate, while also assessing the capacity of the particular institution, given its available resources, to adequately address that individual's needs. Obviously, in some cases, evaluation makes it clear that an individual's weaknesses so outweigh his or her strengths that he or she is not suitable for religious life. But in the majority of cases, psychological assessment becomes one step in a process of determining the compatibility, or "goodness of fit," between a particular candidate with unique gifts and shortcomings and a particular community or diocese with specific charisms and sociocultural realities. For example, if a vocation director in a largely rural diocese with limited mental health resources discovers through psychological evaluation that a candidate with some notable strengths and clear potential to serve in that diocese also needs a period of regular psychotherapy, which cannot be pursued in the diocese, what is the ethical, charitable, and just decision to make? Should he or she bring the candidate into formation, knowing no psychotherapy services will be available, and

close his or her eyes to the candidate's need? Should he or she simply dismiss the candidate from formation without directing him or her to services elsewhere? Should he or she encourage the candidate to pursue the needed psychotherapy and assist him or her in finding services elsewhere, while remaining periodically in touch with him or her and inviting him or her to consider reapplying upon completion of the therapeutic work?

This hypothetical situation illustrates how crucial it is for those initiating assessments to recognize why they are asking the questions typically raised in an assessment. They must also examine what their concepts of human development are, particularly as they intersect with their concept of religious formation, and what degree of commitment to a candidate's growth they are realistically prepared to make. Finally, they must be aware of the conflicting pull exercised by the sharp decline in number of vocations on one hand and the fear of getting "stuck" with problematic "cases" on the other.

GOALS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

For many people, assessment is synonymous with the administration of one or several psychological tests, which yield profiles and cutoff scores—which in turn determine decisions regarding the viability of candidates for priesthood or religious life. But psychological assessment, though it often includes tests, is a process that encompasses far more than obtaining scores. I would suggest that there are five central goals of psychological assessment:

- 1) To uncover patterns of strength and weakness in an individual's coping style and personality structure.
- 2) To identify risk factors for potential later difficulties.
- 3) To compose a picture of an individual's story (developmental, familial, vocational, professional) and to assess whether that story falls within the "normal" range of experience in the individual's culture—and also to assess the impact of any non-normative experiences on the individual: Have they been absorbed well? Has the individual coped adequately? Has he or she been enriched in some way by the experiences? Are there any apparently enduring difficulties related to these experiences?
- 4) To assess an individual's relational history. Regardless of an individual's cultural mores or specific cultural prescriptions on various aspects of relationships, the fact that the individual will be functioning as a Christian Catholic minister within

his or her own culture (or another) presupposes a certain relational focus and capacity, which needs to be evaluated.

- 5) To assess any history of significant difficulties or setbacks (medical, psychological, spiritual, vocational, relational, professional), the way they were addressed, the impact they had on the individual, and the extent to which they have either been overcome or continue to affect the individual in significant ways.

In order to fulfill these five goals, one devises an assessment protocol, which typically includes a variety of components, including interviews and testing. Ideally, a thorough assessment includes the following components:

A psychosocial history, including family history (exploring personality characteristics and patterns of relationship among family members), characteristics of the home environment (degree of stability, presence of any hardships or traumas, family culture and expectations), school experience (relationships with peers, teachers, academic performance, specific areas of struggle), job experiences, leisure interests.

A psychosexual history, including early sexual memories; early sexual experiences; experiences of sexual abuse; attitudes toward sexuality in the home; experience of puberty, masturbation, dating; sexual orientation; current sexual interests and struggles; history of paraphilic interests (see "Taking a Sexual History" by Gerald D. Coleman, S.S., in *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Spring 1996).

A history of alcohol and other substance use, especially as might relate to any emotional or behavioral problems an individual manifests.

A clinical review, including a review of past and current medical and psychiatric status and history of counseling or psychotherapy.

Psychological testing, including objective and projective tests, to yield information on personality style, areas of psychological conflict, and current psychological difficulties.

Neuropsychological screening, to examine the functioning of the brain, which mediates all perception and experience—including a brief assessment of intellectual and memory skills, abstract reasoning ability, mental flexibility, visual-spatial functioning, and motor functioning.

A spirituality assessment, including a description of images and experiences of God, preferred biblical texts, prayer practices, vocational story, spiritual crises experienced (to be conducted by an experienced spiritual director).

Medical tests and examination if the individual has not had regular medical care. This is important as it often uncovers serious undiagnosed conditions that may be producing some cognitive, emotional, or behavioral impairment and that need prompt attention.

The findings in these different areas are then integrated to provide a multifaceted portrait of the individual evaluated. The richness of findings available from such a thorough assessment makes it possible to understand the results of personality tests in light of the individual's history, as well as the results of neuropsychological findings, which indicate when there might be organic difficulties contributing to behavioral, emotional, or cognitive problems. The medical results often shed further light on the individual's overall story. And the spirituality findings are illuminated by personality dynamics, which they in turn inform.

Obviously, such a thorough assessment, typically involving the participation of several clinicians, is not feasible in all settings. But a shorter assessment protocol can be designed with an awareness of the contributions of the various components described and a recognition of the importance of asking careful interview questions that explore those areas.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING

At present, there is still considerable variability in the tests typically used across different settings. In many places, the only tests used are the so-called *objective tests*, which generally take the form of long surveys consisting of straightforward, nonambiguous questions to which individuals give "true" or "false" answers. The most widely used objective test is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), which has been translated into numerous languages and for which norms have been developed with various populations. This test is easy and inexpensive to administer and to score, though it should, like all psychological tests, be interpreted by a trained clinical psychologist. The MMPI can yield information about individuals' degree of psychological distress, personality style, and the presence of certain symptoms of psychopathology. Numerous seminary and other formation settings administer the MMPI as their primary (and often only) psychological test.

This raises a serious issue. The nature of objective tests is such that highly verbal, fairly intelligent individuals can produce profiles that are valid and look reasonably normal even when there are serious underlying problems. Recent research has found that these tests cannot reliably distinguish between two subgroups of people who look "good" on these tests: (1) those who are genuinely healthy, and (2) those who are psychologically distressed and maintain or present an illusion of mental health through defensive denial of psychological distress. People in the defensive group would be characterized by a need to see themselves as well-adjusted, despite underlying difficulties and vulnerabilities.

In my experience and that of colleagues, many clergy, religious, and candidates produce normal (clinically nonsignificant) profiles on objective tests while actually experiencing high degrees of internal turmoil and conflict. It follows that if one uses only objective tests to assess the psychological state of a candidate, there is a significant probability of missing some important pieces of the overall portrait. These pieces are generally provided by projective tests.

Projective tests present ambiguous, unstructured stimuli. Since there are no obviously correct responses to the stimuli, individuals must project onto them some of their own internal material in order to interpret them. These tests therefore give the examiner a glimpse into an individual's inner world, including whatever conflicts, tensions, stresses, distortions, and vulnerabilities might be present. The most widely used and researched projective technique worldwide is the Rorschach Inkblot Test. We have found projective tests, particularly the Rorschach, to be very rich sources of data in evaluating religious, clergy, and candidates.

As a group, these individuals tend to do better with clear structure and situations that are unambiguous. Many of them do not seem to do well in unstructured, highly ambiguous situations. Personality theory and clinical observation suggest that at times, individuals can manifest compulsivity and rigidity in their behavior as a way to externally create a kind of structure that is lacking internally. Conversely, individuals with a high degree of internal structure and order tend to need less external structuring and tend to appear more flexible and less compulsive. The projective tests give a measure of an individual's ability to create structure and make sense out of an inherently unstructured stimulus. Doing this involves marshaling the necessary psychic resources, which becomes quite difficult in the presence of significant internal turmoil, conflicts, or perceptual problems. In many cases, clergy, religious, and candidates undergoing evaluation produce objective test results within

the normal range and projective test results suggesting high levels of distress, poor coping resources, vulnerability to perceptual distortions, and difficulty dealing effectively with emotions. It is thus essential to include projective testing as part of any candidate assessment if one is to have a reasonably complete picture of the individual's psychological strengths and weaknesses and of the issues that are likely to become problematic in the course of formation and subsequent ministry.

SCREENING FOR PEDOPHILIA

Formators and superiors frequently ask whether there is a test that can conclusively identify individuals who are likely to engage in sexual behavior with minors. The answer is no—there is no single instrument that can reliably identify individuals at risk. However, we have found that gathering the breadth of data available from a holistic assessment such as the one described earlier allows us to consistently identify a series of risk factors that leave certain individuals more vulnerable to developing sexual behavior problems. Important among these are a history of early sexual abuse or trauma, a history of poor peer relationships and difficulty feeling accepted by and connected to peers, a lack of emotional closeness and support in the family of origin or from other significant individuals in childhood, and a history of difficulty recognizing intimacy needs and addressing them in appropriate ways (see "Red Flags for Child Sexual Abuse" by Stephen J. Rossetti, in *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Winter 1994). Of course, no risk factor should be viewed as indicating that an individual will necessarily become sexually involved with minors. The presence of any risk factor needs to be viewed in light of the individual's overall psychological and psychosocial context (hence the importance of using appropriate test instruments to gather accurate information). Significant mitigating factors (e.g., the experience of psychotherapy work or the presence of long-term, nurturing relationships in adulthood) can significantly reduce the risk potentially posed by any factor.

CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

In discussing issues of assessment with formators and superiors working in different parts of the world, a question often arises: How can we assess our candidates when there are no available tests in the local language, with culturally appropriate scales, questions, and parameters?

In answering this question, the starting point is to send people back to considering the purpose of as-

essment. Even when no appropriate tests are available, much of the desired information can be gathered through careful interviewing by skilled practitioners (preferably experienced clinicians or others with a good understanding of developmental issues and personality dynamics). Interviewers should know the local cultural reality well, and know how to ask candidates questions about their history in a way that is culturally sensitive yet challenging when necessary. Interviewers should also understand well the reality of religious and priestly life, particularly as lived out in that cultural setting. It is always desirable to have more than one clinician work with a particular candidate being assessed. This is even more important when assessment must rely primarily on interviews: at least two, and preferably several, experienced individuals should interview each candidate.

The advantage of using tests in assessment (particularly projective ones, which deal with unconscious material) is that they tap into conflicts, struggles, and areas of difficulty that an individual could not access consciously or would be afraid or ashamed to discuss openly—which would otherwise be difficult to assess without extended psychotherapy, interviews, or observation. When there is limited access to clinicians and minimal clinical time available for assessment, it would be most productive to request that the time be dedicated to some form of projective testing. This, combined with the results of thorough interviews, would in most cases surface the important issues a particular candidate may be carrying. If there is no access to clinicians able to administer tests, formators and superiors will have to rely on thorough interviewing and careful observation of the candidate in interaction with others. Alternatively, they may decide to send candidates elsewhere for assessment, provided this can be done by clinicians sensitive to the individual's cultural issues.

It should also be noted that psychopathology may manifest rather differently in different cultures and may be interpreted rather differently. Generally, in non-Western cultures, one sees a decrease in psychological symptoms and an increased dominance of somatic symptoms. For example, depression, which in Western settings tends to be expressed largely through alterations in mood, motivation, self-perception, and other psychological symptoms, is expressed in Eastern settings primarily through disturbances in the abdomen and chest. Those performing assessments must be familiar with local concepts and expressions of mental health and illness if they are to discover the pattern of strengths and vulnerabilities in particular candidates.

USE OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS

As stated at the outset, there is considerable variability across settings in how the results of psychological assessments are treated. Sometimes, they are shared with the candidate and with the relevant formators and superiors. Often, they are not. The issue of whether, when, and how to transfer the information obtained through assessment is a complex one and relates importantly to the way one thinks about assessments in a given setting.

I would like to mention a few points that might clarify thinking and decision making regarding the way this information is handled. First, it is of the utmost importance (and ethically imperative for the testing psychologists) to give candidates feedback regarding the findings of their evaluation. Psychological assessment is an intense, often exhausting, and rather intrusive process; it is inappropriate to require an individual to submit to such a process without then providing some thoughtful, empathic feedback that explains the major findings and places them in the context of the individual's overall story. This feedback should ideally be delivered by the testing psychologist. Because feedback is at times difficult to hear and may present painful issues for the candidate's consideration, it is also essential to offer support and to direct the individual to counseling and other resources when appropriate. Second, confidentiality needs to be respected. The examiners can disclose assessment results only with the consent of the candidate and only to those individuals authorized by the candidate to receive the results. Once the results are in the system, they should be handled with continued sensitivity to confidentiality and to creating an environment of trust that fosters growth. Third, it is helpful for superiors and formators in each setting to define and implement a policy governing the use of assessment information so that it can reach the parts of the system where it is most necessary.

Over the years, the prevailing tendency was to keep formators "blind" to psychological assessment results, in order that they not be unduly influenced or prejudiced as they guided a candidate's spiritual and vocational development. Our experience tells us that the psychological and spiritual dimensions are inextricably intertwined, making it unrealistic to assume they can be treated as neatly separate dimensions. It would seem fairer to formators and candidates that both be aware of assessment results, provided these are carefully explained by the testing psychologist. Formators especially should have some knowledge of individual candidates' significant issues for two primary reasons: so they will be better equipped to work effectively with those candidates in formation, and so

they do not inadvertently compound or aggravate significant issues affecting a given candidate. However, an active, judicious integration of assessment findings into the formation program presumes a collaborative effort on the part of all involved.

Formators ideally need, as part of their preparation to do formation work, some in-depth understanding of human development and personality dynamics, as well as frequently encountered forms of psychopathology, their origins, and the best ways to handle them in a formation setting. They need to be able to understand the results of assessment as presented in reports and their implications for working with a particular individual.

Testing psychologists need to have a good understanding of the test instruments and of priestly and/or religious life in order to interpret test findings accurately. They also need to write thorough, clear reports that are readily accessible to "lay" readers, spelling out the ways test findings are likely to translate into behavior patterns and explaining the implications for the candidate's pursuit of seminary or religious life. Finally, they need to provide clear, direct, supportive feedback to evaluatees and to the referring superiors and formators.

Candidates need to make a commitment to listen to feedback and to take up the challenges and invitations to growth and healing presented by the assessment results. As painful as such a commitment sometimes is, it enables candidates to explore deeply the meaning of vocation for them and the extent to which they are prepared to embrace a call to become fully alive as they confront and integrate their gifts and their vulnerabilities.

INVITATIONS

I would call on formators and superiors to consider the following invitations:

- 1) To become aware of their attitudes toward assessment and the ways these influence the assessment process;
- 2) To understand more fully the benefits and limitations of specific assessment instruments and to take responsibility for ensuring that the assessment protocols they use are providing the most complete possible portrait of a candidate;
- 3) To include projective testing whenever possible;
- 4) To work with clinicians and candidates on the assessment process so that it becomes the beginning of a journey of discovery, learning, and growth for all concerned.

RECOMMENDED READING

- Carnes, P. "Sexual Addiction: Implications for Spiritual Formation." *Studies in Formative Spirituality* 8, no. 2 (1987):165-79.
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Luisa M. Saffiotti, Ph.D., a clinical associate at the Alexander Institute in Washington, D.C., is on the faculty of the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality in Silver Spring, Maryland. Her work includes psychotherapy, assessment, education, and consultation to religious communities internationally.

Religious Life Revisited

George J. Auger, C.S.V.

Not that I have become perfect yet; I have not yet won, but I am still running, trying to capture the prize for which Christ Jesus has captured me. (Ph. 3:12)

Saints Paul and John, the beloved disciple, have this in common: both seem to be driven men, afire with the desire to introduce us to Someone. A sense of excitement, enthusiasm, and fascination seems to have captivated their imaginations and hearts. It is in this sense that Paul writes, "It is for this that I struggle wearily on, helped only by the power driving me irresistibly" (Col. 1:29). What is this power, this mysterious attraction, this drivenness? It is the power of God's love as manifested in Jesus. It is not simply their love of Jesus, but rather their response to God's love for them in Jesus, for the measure of our love will always be conditioned by the conscious awareness of God's love for us in Jesus: "Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that those who believe in him may not be lost but may have eternal life" (John 3:15–16). If we have been captivated by the Pearl of Great Price (Matt. 13:44), it is only because we have discovered that we are another pearl, equally of great price, which God has given everything to possess. The spiritual life, no

matter how inarticulately we phrase it, is rooted in the Trinity: God's love for us in Jesus, our Way, Truth, and Life, and made visible and alive today by the power of the Holy Spirit, the reciprocal love of Father and Son, abiding within each of us.

In some mysterious way, religious life is also marked by a kind of drivenness. What meaning can our vowed life possibly have if we are not in love with Someone—or, to put it perhaps more realistically, if we do not have the deep desire to be in love with Someone; if we are not, always in our poverty, somehow captivated by the Pearl of Great Price? As religious, we are a marginal people who choose to live visibly and radically the gospel values so often seen as sheer foolishness by our culture. Jesus is our fascination, God's Word made visible, and it is he who is behind our foolishness (1Cor. 1:25; 2Cor. 6:8–10). Such has always been true. One thinks of the love story of a Charles de Foucault, a Francis of Assisi, an Ignatius Loyola, a Teresa of Avila, a Louis Querbes. It is the story of most founders of religious orders. It is only within this context—that is, the logic of love rooted in the Paschal Mystery—that our religious life can have "significant" meaning, both for us personally and for those whose lives we touch.

DEFINING RELIGIOUS LIFE

In essence, religious life may be defined quite simply. It is my personal response in love to a God who has first loved us. "This is the love that I mean, not that we have loved God, but that God has loved us" (1John 4:10). Before vows, or constitutions, or exterior forms, or even the apostolate, religious life places one within the hands of God, who is recognized and adored as Lord of all and who is lovingly present in concrete life situations. This truth is lived in communion with others; we call it community life.

Religious life is a vocation, an invitation, a call. It is not simply one's preferential choice of a way of life. In the end, religious life is a response to a personal call by the Spirit of Jesus to a life of intimacy. An element of drivenness is always present. We are in the mysterious realm of grace: "It is not you who have chosen me, but I who have chosen you" (John 15:16). In this we see the difference, for example, from the call to the priesthood. In the latter case, it is the bishop who "calls" those candidates deemed apt. We are in the realm of ecclesiastical hierarchy. But it is not the superior who "calls" the candidate to religious life. The superior may ascertain the authenticity of the call, but its origin is elsewhere. The call to religious life remains a deeply personal one stemming from the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the origin of religious life is said to be charismatic. This is always the "mystery" of religious life.

Of course, most of the above was vague as we entered the novitiate years ago. Still, as the years wore on, some echo of the above may have reverberated within our deepest self. As we take time to review our life as religious, we often find that some of our more significant moments of spiritual growth occurred without our realizing it. We became aware of them long after the experience. As Thomas Merton writes in *The Climate of Monastic Prayer*,

We do not understand it as soon as we receive it—we grow into it gradually, almost imperceptibly. Like all God's gifts, the religious vocation shares in His own hiddenness and His own mystery. It is God who will reveal Himself to us as the gift of our vocation, and He will do it in His own good time, and most likely He will do it gradually.

I think it is good that we take time now and again to ask ourselves the *Quem Queritis?* of Saint Benedict. There will always be the temptation to avoid this question, even flee from it. But, as we do, we gradually distance ourselves from the deepest dimension of our calling. When speaking of religious life, we are in the realm of gratuitous grace.

NOT A CALL TO PERFECTION

One grows into the mystery of religious life, which, like life itself, is a process always rooted in the Paschal Mystery. The more we put off asking ourselves "Why have you come here?" the less will our religious life have meaning. And what is the answer to that question? Again, as with Benedict, the only answer can be "To seek Christ." This means having the deep desire to live ever more profoundly in Him, with Him, by Him; to put on Christ, to have the mind and heart of Jesus, as Saint Paul so eloquently reminds us: "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Ph. 2:5); "I live now, not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Of course, this is the call of every Christian in Baptism. But what is the specificity of religious life within the Christian vocation? We all know that religious life is not a higher calling than that of every Christian. Religious life is not a call to perfection.

Formerly, it was common to seek some kind of divine origin in the vocation to religious life. Scripture does not bear this out. The gospel narratives do not present two ways of so-called perfection: one "demanded" of all Christians (the way of the commandments) and the other "proposed" for those seeking not only salvation but also perfection (the way of the evangelical Counsels). Nowhere in scripture does Jesus propose a ladder or hierarchy to the ideal he gives to all men and women. It is to everyone that he says, "You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Again, religious life is not a "higher" calling than that of any Christian. It is in this vein that Dietrich Bonhoeffer so eloquently speaks in his classic *The Cost of Discipleship*. If one can speak of a "higher" calling, I am not sure we religious would indeed rank as having one. Think for a moment of the calling of the Christian parent who loses a child or of the homeless or of victims of war or discrimination. Does not their living of the Paschal Mystery often go beyond that of many religious? In my own life, for example, apart from the infirmities that inevitably follow upon being human, I know that many (perhaps most) of my so-called "crosses" have been of my own making, stemming as they do from within (i.e., from pride, ambition, self-centeredness, envy, the desire of praise), whereas those of the so-called ordinary Christian often stem from without (i.e., from a culture rooted in materialism, consumerism, and greed, and from life situations over which one has little or no control).

Certainly, part of the problem of seeing our lives in terms of trying to become perfect stems from a Pelagian emphasis on the seeking of perfection, which in

former days was often part of our formation process. This, of course, was part and parcel of what seems to have been the prevailing ascetical theology of forty or fifty years ago. When one views religious life in terms of pursuing perfection, one almost automatically enters the realm of moral theology or the moral virtues, in which the rightness or wrongness of human acts is all-important and mortal and venial sins are meticulously reasoned out. The stress is on our actions rather than God's. Theoretically, one knows that all is done with God's grace—but, as we say, "God helps those who help themselves." Fortunately for us, "God helps the helpless."

The fundamental gospel imperative of religious life is that shared by all Christians: You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). The gospel imperative is rooted, it seems to me, much more within the context of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity than within that of the moral virtues. The call is to live ever more deeply *in Christo*, and its origin is in the sacrament of Baptism. Here we are in the realm of being rather than doing. For example, a homily rooted in the moral virtues can be very effective. We can give many concrete examples of injustice, racial discrimination, disrespect for life, environmental pollution. We can involve our listeners emotionally, even to the point of making them feel guilty. The sad tragedy is that we fail to offer them the power by which these evils can be confronted. What is this power? It is their life hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3), or the power of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. What all too often happens is that instead of the Good News, we preach good advice.

Religious life, like all Christian life, is rooted in the gospel. How do they differ? What, really, is the difference between a religious Christian and a Christian religious? Religious life is a life, freely chosen, whose end is to live radically, and as one's ordinary way of life, the gospel message. Our vocation is, in the end, responding to a call or invitation to live Christ significantly—that is, to be known and recognized as disciples of the Lord. Here we are far beyond the purely moral order. Christ does not impose this or that moral demand, but rather invites one to live a way of life in and of faith—a way of life that is an ostensible and demonstrable sign of God's reign among us.

Before developing what I see as the "constitutive" elements of religious life, let me summarize in a general way what I have said thus far. The following quotation is from *Religieux aujourd'hui* by J. M. R. Tillard, O.P. (translation mine):

One enters religious life, basically, because of Christ. . . . Just as the sons of Zebedee left their nets and Levi his ac-

Religious are marginal people within society and, at times, within the hierarchical structure of the church itself

counts not to preach the gospel—at this point they did not even know what gospel to preach—but because they met Someone who, passing by, seized their attention. Likewise does the religious take vows (which, in a sense, distances the religious from those common blessings of life in which most find their fulfillment) because the religious has, in some way, met Christ; has indeed been seized by him.

Here we are not in the moral order, even the most sublime, but in the theological. It is the order described in Matthew's parable of the "pearl of great price." Seized by the treasure found in his field, leaving aside all logic, he sells all to possess it. He is, as it were, possessed by his discovery. In the same way do certain men and women, having met the gaze of the Lord at a decisive moment in their lives, willingly and joyfully leave all else in the shadows—without denying or despising other goods or relationships of the world; these take on meaning only in reference to that which is central in their lives. All that is in opposition is, by that very fact, excluded. . . . Alone, this fascination—this mysterious enthusiasm of having somehow met the Lord—can explain a Francis, an Ignatius, or a Teresa of Avila.

This mysterious and charismatic element, so essential to religious life, is not infrequently found in those seeking entrance into our religious congregations today—hence the importance of reflecting upon and deepening this experience of God in our formation programs. I might add that the fascination for Christ in the heart of a would-be religious is, more often than not, enkindled and set ablaze by the living witness of a religious whose life somehow radiates the presence of the Risen Lord—someone who has met the Lord and whose very life introduces him to others.

AXES OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Let me describe briefly what I see as the constitutive elements of religious life, or what one might call the axes of religious life.

Religious life, a living memorial (kerygma). As mentioned earlier, sometimes we religious fall into the error of substituting good advice for Good News. Instead of salvation, we proclaim morality; instead of Paradise regained, we proclaim Paradise to be gained. It was not so with the early Christians, who lived in the joy of the Risen Presence of Christ. For them, it was a matter not of achieving God's love but of celebrating it already at work in the present moment: "The whole group of believers was united in heart and soul; they testified to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus . . . and praised God joyfully" (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-34; 5:12-16).

As religious, we are called to be signs of the Risen Presence of the Lord. Our lives are meant to be sacraments of the Living Presence of Jesus for today's world, as well as for the church. In a sense, we are called to live a fulfilled hope, or the "already" in the "not yet." To quote Jean Claude Guy, O.P., author of *La vie religieuse, mémoire évangélique de l'Eglise* (translation mine):

That which is specific about religious life, its prime ecclesial ministry, is to be an evangelical memory for the People of God. Thus, religious life cannot be faithful to itself unless it roots itself in the gospel and thereby has an ever-deepening experience of God. This experience, renewed each day, personally and in common, allows one to be grasped by Jesus. This is precisely what is meant when the Vatican Council II speaks of religious life as a symbol of the unbreakable link between Christ and his spouse, the church.

Giving witness to the Risen Presence of the Lord can be done only when one is "grasped" by Jesus. Here the life of prayer, the prayer of the "poor" religious, is essential. At the heart of religious life will always be this element of adoration. As a living memorial, religious life introduces resurrection into human existence. Life is what we are all about, and the power of the resurrection is that pentecostal gift of the Spirit which draws us to our way of life. Living within us, it makes present for the People of God the mysteries of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord: "The mystery of Christ among you . . . and now the life you live, and he is your life, is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 1:27; 3:3). I would call this a constitutive element of religious life—its specific kerygma.

Fellowship in love (koinonia). If religious life serves as a living memorial of the post-Paschal event and, as

such, an existential sign of the Risen Presence, it does this in fellowship (communion) with others. In this sense, it is a microcosm of the church. This is the basis for our community life. Why do men and women gather together in religious congregations? The answer can only be Christ. Apostolate, traditions, friendship are certainly important, yet they cannot be first. In the mystery of religious life, we strive daily to grasp him who has first grasped us (Phil. 3:13). And so when we speak of fellowship, we mean, first of all, fellowship with each other in and with the Lord.

Each religious lives a deeply personal and unique love story with the Lord. Community is born when several persons freely choose to live their love story in common with brothers and/or sisters. We call this a faith community. It is the Lord who brings them together, and his gift is communion. As such, it will always be a eucharistic community, praising God and full of thanksgiving with Christ as its heartbeat. It will also be a freeing, loving, searching, suffering, waiting, praying, and inviting community. Its life, like that of Jesus, will invite others to "Come and see" (John 1:47). It will be a community in which the Paschal Mystery is lived individually and corporately. In such a community, members do not choose one another. It is radically different from other human fraternities. Why do such persons find themselves together? Again, the answer can only be Christ. The love among them is that of *agape*.

For the People of God (diakonia). Our religious life proclaims the Risen Lord in communion with others. This is made visible as well as authenticated in our ministry and presence among the People of God. Whether this ministry be lived in the hiddenness of the cloister or in the far reaches of a missionary apostolate makes little difference. Both are essentially directed to the People of God. This I would call the ecclesial vocation and mission of religious life. The distinctions made between contemplative life, apostolic religious life, secular institutes, and societies of apostolic life are man-made, referring as they do to "externals" rather than to the heart of religious life. In reality, all congregations are meant to be both contemplative and apostolic. Vows, whatever they may be, derive their primary meaning as they are rooted themselves in Christ. Chastity does not mean availability; poverty does not mean freedom from material burdens; obedience does not mean submission to the will of God via the voice of a superior. Vows are essentially our total response in love to the Christ who has grasped us. They are part of our complete offering of self to God. As the most ancient formulas of religious consecration indicate, one be-

comes a religious quite simply “for the Glory of God.”

The heart of religious life, like that of Jesus, will always be open to the People of God. It cannot be otherwise: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that we may have eternal life” (John 3:16). Religious life is a ministry of service to the People of God.

He always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was. . . . He poured water in a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet and to wipe them with a towel he was wearing. (John 12:1–5)

His state was divine; yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as [all] are; and being as [all] are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a Cross. (Phil. 2:6–8)

It is sometimes said that congregations are experiencing a crisis of identity. I would suggest that this will inevitably happen when religious life is seen and lived almost exclusively in terms of the apostolate—in terms of what we do rather than who we are as religious. Our identity will be found in the radical living of the gospel—our “ordinary” way of life.

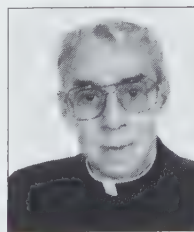
RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY

Essentially, religious life today is the same as it was yesterday, though it may not seem to be. Constitutions may change, religious garb may be discarded, traditional apostolates may be altered, and fellowship may take new forms, but in the end, religious life continues to belong to that mysterious order of realities in which the Holy Spirit works to further the life of grace within the People of God. It is a contracultural life, escaping the current order and values of society. Religious are marginal people within society and, at times, within the hierarchical structure of the church itself. History gives abundant witness to this. It is good to remember that religious life is born from the rich soil of the People of God. It was their cry that inspired our founders.

Pope Paul VI stated that to the church, religious propose to be “Specialists of God”—specialists in the sense of having experienced God in such a way that God had become their life project. Leonardo Boff expresses this beautifully in *Witnesses in the Heart of the World*:

The more transparent and radical this living religiously succeeds in being, the greater the evangelizing effect it will have. It is not because religious do a certain number of things or aid in different works. The religious’ main work is himself or herself. The conversion and the authenticity of religious speak for themselves, attesting to the truth of the gospel. One’s entire life becomes language, which proclaims and denounces to the extent that it is authentic and transparent. Thus, in order to evangelize, it is not necessary to use a catechetical approach, to be well-read in theology and the explanation of the mysteries of faith, nor to carry out a specific missionary work. The religious’ own life is evangelizing by his or her special way of making God and Jesus the center of life. By evangelizing in this way, religious become signs or sacraments of the presence of God in the world around them.

Long before being the exclusive expression of a ministry in the building up of the Kingdom, religious life is meant to be a hymn of praise. Its deepest call is at the heart of our being. It is the Father who “sends” us with Jesus in the Spirit. This, of course, is a favorite theme in John’s gospel. Where we are sent, in which ministry we are sent, requires a discerning spirit firmly rooted in prayer. In everything, however, it is with whom we are sent that matters most, remembering always that it is in our poverty that we are sent: “I willingly boast of my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I am content with weakness, with mistreatment, with distress, with persecution and difficulties for the sake of Christ; for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong” (2Cor. 17:9–10).



Father George J. Auger, C.S.V., M.Ed., is a resource person in spirituality for his brother Victorians in the congregation’s Chicago (Illinois) Province.

Cultural Traditions Challenge Communities

Mary Eugene Gilmore, C.S.JB.

We are all members of the world community, whether we recognize it or not. Our interdependence is clearly reflected not only in cyberspace, where advances allow us to be connected to people all over the world, but also in the political realm, where individual countries can no longer be completely autonomous (witness the international intervention in Albania and the possibility of same in Sierra Leone). These realities center on our lived experience as consecrated persons whose religious families are filled with individuals from cultures vastly different from our own.

Because I now work in the central office of my religious order, I have had the opportunity to spend three months with our sisters in Zambia, Africa. As an American, I went to Africa with a great sense of anticipation to learn more about a part of the world that I knew only superficially. What I began to understand was how much I don't understand.

CULTURE AND INCULTURATION

What does the buzzword *inculturation* mean? One cannot move to inculturation without an understanding of culture itself. In a speech entitled "Inculturated Religious Life in Africa Today," Aylward Shorter explains that "culture is acquired or learned

by individuals as members of a human society. It controls their perception of reality. It offers them a system of meanings embodied in images and symbols. It shapes their understandings, feelings, and behavior. It gives them a group identity. Culture is the prism through which a human society views the whole of its experience—domestic, social, economic, and political." Inculturation, although a fairly new concept in anthropology and theology, has become one way of understanding the mission of the church. Without the benefit of intense research, my own understanding of it was simply that the church had to be open to the values of the cultures of the peoples who were being evangelized. It does mean that—but it also means a great deal more.

ROLE IN CHURCH'S MISSION

Some historians have condemned Western colonizers for imposing their culture on the peoples they subdued as they entered into world expansion. Since missionaries often accompanied explorers and colonizers, the church too has been cited for its lack of respect for indigenous cultures. Many from the West did not recognize that every people has a culture. Lack of cultural awareness impinges not only on the mission lands to which we have been

sent but also on our own understanding of how we, as people, process our experiences. We must understand how we have been shaped by our own cultures before we can move into another culture or accept people from that culture.

What is it that the missionary—or, for that matter, every Christian—has to offer to his or her neighbor? The greatest gift we have to offer is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the world. The Good News that Jesus lived was, and still is, absolutely counter-cultural; it is a revolutionary way of life. Every local church—whether in Africa or Asia or Europe or America or anywhere else in this world—must be in continuous, humble, and loving dialogue with the life realities of its people as they strive together to live the Good News within those realities. To quote from *Ad Gentes* (Vatican II), “In order to be able to offer to all men the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, the Church must become part of all these groups for the same motive which led Christ to bind Himself, in virtue of His Incarnation, to the definite social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He dwelt.” Those who bring the Good News must experience the same self-emptying as did Jesus. To understand another person’s culture, we must do more than just enjoy a different way of worshiping or cooking or celebrating the important events in human experience. Learning how people process experience takes time and sensitivity and humility; if we are to begin to understand one another’s cultures, we must start with these.

In an essay entitled “What Is So New About Inculturation?” Arji R. Crollius and T. Nkéramihigo note that when the church brings to a new culture the revolutionary teaching of Jesus, and when that culture translates, assimilates, and transforms Christianity into its own life, the church itself is enriched by the gift of the newly transformed culture. Inculturation involves not only a meeting but also a fusion that reshapes both the church and the culture. In a paper on the culture of African womanhood, U. E. Umoren writes that “inculturation is a two-way process: it roots the gospel in a culture and introduces that culture to Christianity.” In religious life, this same principle is operative in relation to the congregation’s charism.

MISSION LANDS TODAY

The church’s ministry in many of what were once mission lands is moving in a different direction from that of the past. This, of course, is based on the work of missionaries and on the fact that today the ministry is being directed by native clergy. We in the West come out of a tradition of building large centers

to serve people, whether through education, health care, or some other form of social service. Our preoccupation with bigger and better and more as the measure of success says something about our culture and how we have been shaped. What I saw of the work of the church in Zambia, in Malawi, and in South Africa revealed to me that they are much more able to respond quickly to the needs of their people—AIDS victims, handicapped children, lepers, street urchins, prostitutes, the sick in villages, town children in need of an education. Their time and efforts are not expended on preserving complexes. Their lack of attachment to buildings gives them freedom to move.

REACTIONS TO PAST

In sharing with our Zambian sisters in various missions, I have heard that in the African church today there is a movement toward developing in the people a sense of working for what they need. Some religious communities have given to their people from the abundance sent by generous donors in other parts of the world. Many Africans today believe that using that approach now is not really helping the population. The local church has recognized that instead of giving, some religious orders have taught skills to people so they could do for themselves.

If we understand what the church is raising to consciousness today, the teacher is also a learner. We have to learn from each culture the values it has to offer us so that we can become richer. In Zambia, for example, the liturgical celebrations radiate the people’s joy in the Lord through song and dance; it vibrates from their bodies. Our Western religious expression is cerebral; theirs involves the entire person. We have to be open to learning from all God’s children, no matter how different their ways may be from ours.

I have heard Zambia’s president say again and again on television that Zambians must be self-sufficient; they can no longer depend on gifts from outside. They need to develop and believe in their own capacity to succeed, to build a viable economy, to live in peace and prosperity. Within our missionary efforts, many of the people we serve desire the same emphasis on developing their own talents and capabilities.

HARD WORK OF DISCERNMENT

Today, if I read the situation in Zambia correctly, the local church is making a major effort to identify and to celebrate the indigenous cultural traditions. That is a necessary step in growth. If we are not

aware of who we are and what gifts we bring to the world, to the church, and to our religious communities, we are truly dependent.

While in Zambia, I read some of the reports from the annual meetings of the Association of East African Sisterhoods. They gave evidence of people searching for their own identity, retrieving traditional practices from their tribal backgrounds, and trying to fit them into their church and community experience.

In many of our mission countries, we now have indigenous clergy and members of religious orders. They carry their culture within them, just as Westerners do. That is of immense benefit to the local people, who now have clergy and religious who know and understand them in ways most Westerners were not able to. However, in any culture there are things that do not fit with the gospel values. As noted in the Jesuit *Decrees of General Congregation 34*, "Inculturation can also be related to the Paschal Mystery: cultures, under the impact of the liberating power of the gospel, rid themselves of their negative features and enter the freedom of God's Kingdom. The gospel brings a prophetic challenge to every culture to remove all those things which inhibit the justice of the Kingdom."

Each of us must try to recognize those cultural elements which we have absorbed from our society but which do not fit with what Jesus taught and lived. Right now, many local churches in places once considered mission lands are involved in identifying and celebrating their traditions, which had been denied before—and in some instances they are having difficulty in merging their cultural values with those of Christianity. From my limited view, I think that is one of the major tasks facing the church.

In some areas of Africa, for example, the traditions surrounding death do not spring from a belief in God, who has the power of life and death. Some tribes insist that a widow, for instance, may not eat or drink or bathe during the funeral rites for her husband. The reason behind this is that she must suffer because her husband's family has suffered his loss. In some cases, all the couple's property is taken by the husband's family so that the wife and children are left destitute. Another fairly common practice is treating the birth of a handicapped child as a disgrace. In some cases, such children are hidden away, not sent to school, considered almost like nonpersons. Polygamy is still fairly common in some areas. These few examples show that Christians living in areas where these practices are acceptable must be strong enough in their faith in Jesus' way to renounce those things which do not recognize God as the master of life and death and the creator of all. The same analysis could and

should be applied to many of the things we in the West take for granted as acceptable practices because they are from our culture.

As religious, we must renounce some of our cultural traditions or run the risk of being split. We can't serve two masters. Coming to terms with practices that are contrary to Christianity will not make us less African or American or Chilean or Korean or Italian. That effort will give us a sense of wholeness in our identity as a Catholic (Mexican, Canadian, French, etc.) consecrated person.

We can help one another raise these issues, but the discernment must be done by the people within the culture. Imposing our judgment without giving people the time and space for the discernment process will not change anything. Change comes from the bottom up. Each of us must do the hard work of looking at how our culture has shaped our values and at the traditional practices that mark our experiences of life (e.g., at birth, puberty, marriage, death). If there is harmony between our cultural experiences and values and those of Jesus, then we have a balance and a sense of wholeness.

Nkéramihigo, a Rwandan Jesuit, wrote in 1984 about the need of cultures to change after their meeting with Jesus. In the 1990s, the disastrous experience of his people, 90 percent of whom are Christians, showed that their tribal hatred has not yet been transformed by the Good News.

Religious communities should help their members enter into the discernment process in order to identify the elements of various cultures that are expressions of God's gifts, as well as to recognize those that must be abandoned because they are expressions of a primitive response to reality that did not reflect an understanding of God's presence in the world.

LEADERSHIP'S TASK

What is the challenge facing leaders of multicultural religious communities? The root of the word *authority* means "to make grow." How can we nurture our sisters and brothers when we do not fully understand their reality? Perhaps such questions may generate some dialogue among religious leaders.

As a governing body, we are called to recognize and celebrate the giftedness of each culture that forms part of our religious family. In order to do that, we must have an attitude of profound respect for each culture. If we see ourselves as somehow superior or better qualified or the preservers of Christianity, we will not be able to be open to others. People sense our basic position. Openness and respect are a result of recognizing that we are all children of God, who did not choose the West when he sent his Son.

We need to be sincere before the Lord as we look at our own prejudices and preconceived attitudes. We are not always aware of how those interior attitudes determine our daily interactions with one another. A recent issue of *Review for Religious* (September/October 1996) contains two articles on prejudice within religious communities.

One aim of the government is to safeguard the unity of the family through a clear enunciation of the charism and spirituality of the congregation. The charism is communicated via the culture of the historic foundation, but it too must pass through the stages of translation, assimilation, and transformation. As the charism transforms the new culture, it too undergoes expansion.

Vatican Council II demanded that we return to our roots—that we understand our charisms so that we can spread them. The sense of a shared charism allows us to see that it is not just what we have brought to the diverse cultures to which we have been sent, but also how they have refashioned who we are. The wealth of diversity has configured our religious families in ways that our founders and foundresses would never have dreamed possible. Yet we have not always been clear on what gifts the varied cultures have brought to our religious families. That is another task before us: to identify and celebrate the richness that is ours because people from so many different countries have accepted our charism.

The development of a unifying understanding of the charism must be arrived at with the efforts of all parts of the institute. That is easy to write, but in lived experience it is a tough assignment.

Looking at the diverse cultures that form our religious congregations, we recognize that each has special tasks. The responsibility for building unity is not solely that of the governing body. Each culture should prayerfully identify and celebrate the traditions of its sisters and brothers. When we talk about our sisters and brothers, we are referring to all our members.

We all tend to have a pecking order, whether it is based on which tribe you are from, what ethnic background, what part of the country, what caste, or the level of your or your family's education or wealth. Honesty is not always easy, but if we cannot be honest with ourselves, it will make it almost impossible for us to be honest with anyone else. Recognizing that we can be motivated by attitudes of "I'm better than thou," we can stand before the Lord in humility, asking for the insight that will let us find his Son's face in each culture with which our religious families have been gifted.

Aylward Shorter outlines the conditions that need to be defined by a congregation attempting to be truly international and to favor genuine inculturation: "measure of decentralization, safeguards against cultural domination, emphasis on local languages, cultivation of local responses to the charism, formation that encourages such responses, serious study of local cultures, relativization of its spirituality with regard to that of the local church, monitoring and sharing inculturation initiatives, promoting cultural education and study of local cultures."

Added to all the other tasks of general government is the call to challenge each part of our religious family to identify and respond to the needs of the people in their local churches. Sometimes I think that is more difficult for those of us from the West because we feel we must preserve so much from the past. However, all of us face the limitations of our own humanity, regardless of our cultural background.

In our world torn by divisions, the church stands as a beacon of hope. We demonstrate that people can live together in peace, that gospel values can work in any part of the world. That witness is invaluable. As people called by God to follow his Son, let us continue to be open to one another, to recognize the giftedness of one another, and to celebrate those gifts as a community. As we do that, we will help all the people with whom we live and work to become more aware of how God's love is revealed in who they are—and in who we are as a religious family.

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Sister Mary Eugene Gilmore, C.S.J.B., is presently serving as a general councilor for her community in Rome, Italy. A former high-school and college teacher, she holds degrees in English and pastoral counseling.

A Burdened Leader's Prayer

Reverend Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.

When people start on their spiritual journey, prayer often comes easily. Saint John of the Cross said that beginners may spend "lengthy periods at prayer" and may even find that "penances are pleasures." The cause of their fervor is that God is nurturing them "like a loving mother who nurses [a child] with tender food."

The beginning of the spiritual journey is often punctuated by special, consoling graces that quicken neophytes' choosing of a spiritual calling. These special graces make taking time for prayer more attractive and sweeten moments spent in communion with God. Thus, beginners are excited by their spiritual future. They may have a bit of youthful energy, and they are usually less burdened by the growing responsibilities that come with maturity in ministry.

However, as John of the Cross suggests, at this early point in their spiritual journey, their conduct is "very weak and imperfect . . . their motivation for their spiritual works and exercises is the consolation and satisfaction they experience in them." They may nurture a "secret pride," and their conversation can be "somewhat vain . . . at times very vain . . . even to instruct rather than be instructed." And they become judgmental: "In their hearts they condemn others who do not seem to have the kind of devotion they would like them to have."

However, it will not always be thus. The "milk" of spiritual childhood, these sweet consolations, is eventually withdrawn. The long trek through the hardships of a Christian life inevitably follows.

EXCUSING ONESELF FROM PRAYER

With advancing maturity in ministry and in the spiritual life, special graces fade and the burdens of leadership increase. Finding time to pray becomes more difficult, and prayer is less attractive. There are fewer consolations and more aridity. It becomes easy and tempting to excuse oneself from prayer, citing the pressing needs of ministering to others.

Indeed, sacrificing one's own comfortable schedule in response to others' needs is an integral part of mature ministry, especially for those in leadership. Just as parents of a newborn must plan their daily schedules around the infant's needs, church leaders must make what can feel like a long series of sacrifices for the sake of others. And the greater the leaders' responsibilities, the less their lives are their own.

As Saint Gregory the Great lamented upon becoming Bishop of Rome, "I am forced to consider the affairs of the Church . . . I must weigh the lives and acts of individuals. I am responsible for the concerns of our citizens . . . I must become an administrator."

One should enter a leadership position with some awareness of the sacrifice involved. To enter church leadership today, coveting the power and prestige it will bring, sets one up for great disappointment. What little pleasure such vanity affords is soon overshadowed by the increasing burdens of leadership and the sorrow of seeing so much conflict and human tragedy.

Under such circumstances, one could easily make the case that prayer and a dedication to the spiritual life are even more important for those in leadership positions. Simply being a talented person and working long hours does not guarantee success. A common trap is the belief that “If I, as a leader, work harder than everyone else, I will be successful, and people will be grateful and supportive.” More than a few who fall into that trap become disillusioned.

In addition, leaders are asked to make a large number of decisions based on limited information and a lack of full awareness of the complex outcomes of their decisions. Hard work is not enough. Only the Spirit of God, constantly invoked through prayer and a docile openness, can safely lead a Christian ministry through the minefield of life. The Spirit of God must be the ever-present animator of any leader’s decisions.

Further, the real mettle of any leader—especially a leader in ministry—is shown not in a positive valuation of decisions made but in the leader’s very character and spirit. Strength of character and witness of spirit, based on the leader’s person, either girds the organization with life or cripples it. Working very hard cannot provide strength of character; in some cases, it can actually weaken it. This is particularly true if the effort expended is damagingly excessive or based on a Pelagian concept of ministry.

All the more reason, then, that our leaders in ministry should be people of prayer. Their prayer will not only be an example to others; it will also allow the Spirit to move through them to accomplish God’s work in a myriad of unforeseeable ways. The first task of our Christian leaders is to be people whose own lives are consistently being converted by the active presence of the Spirit of God. So, the first focus of their prayer should be to pray for the people they serve and for themselves.

POWER CAN BE INTOXICATING

But prayer in such leadership positions can seem difficult and unfruitful. In comparison with the early days of consoling grace, the spiritual life can feel like an unending desert. It is no wonder that rather than face such a desert, leaders sometimes choose to distract themselves with the administrative tasks of leadership, often with an outward sigh lamenting the

Leaders are asked to make many decisions based on limited information and a lack of full awareness of the complex outcomes

burdens of ministry. Indeed, the endless tasks of administration are usually experienced as a burden, but they can also be used as an escape from facing one’s self and from facing the inner desert in which God dwells.

A retiring cardinal once said, “To resign from high office is to die a little.” As much as we complain about the burdens of leadership, a bit of a thrill comes with the challenge. Leaders may not like to admit it, but being “in the know” and wielding power can be intoxicating. The leader who frankly admits the seductive attraction of such vanities is less likely to succumb to them.

Power used for Christian service can be a tremendous force for good. On the other hand, power used as an intoxicant can be heady. It inevitably leads to disaster. To keep destructive forces from holding sway and to infuse one’s ministry with grace, constant recourse to prayer is vital.

A THOUSAND DISTRACTIONS

Unfortunately, when burdened leaders sit down to pray in silence, they often have trouble leaving their work behind. Distractions flood their minds; their conscious thoughts are filled with wave after wave of conflicts, decisions, problems, and worries. As Pope Gregory the Great confessed, “Since I assumed the burden of pastoral care, my mind can no longer be collected; it is concerned with so many matters.”

While this is somewhat true of just about anyone in prayer, it is strikingly true for leaders in ministry. Most of them decided many years ago to dedicate their lives to following Jesus and helping others. Thus, they are likely to be sensitive people who desire

to do good for others. Unfortunately, even the most well-intentioned leaders make enemies as well as friends; they hurt others by their decisions, try as they might not to do so; and lots of people want more from them than they can possibly give. In such impossible circumstances, sensitive leaders are always second-guessing their own decisions, wondering if they could have done better, and trying with all their might to do what is right.

So when a quiet moment comes and they sit before the Lord, what comes to mind may not be a pious thought or a feeling of praise. It is more likely to be concern about sick employees, worry about finding money to pay the bills, or thoughts on solving a thorny problem without alienating anyone. Under these circumstances, prayer may seem frustrating and discouraging, if not downright impossible. As Saint Gregory exclaimed in frustration, "My mind [is] divided and torn to pieces by so many problems, how can I meditate . . . ?"

When the mind is flooded by such distractions, a number of time-honored approaches can be tried. These techniques are designed to still and focus the mind. For example, some of those who are distracted in prayer will benefit from repeating the Jesus prayer continually. Others will find the rosary or the Liturgy of the Hours helpful. Still others will find benefit in a prayerful reading of the Sacred Scriptures.

Some form of active meditation is likely to be indicated in these circumstances. There are many active techniques that can be individualized, and they are usually helpful. Anyone struggling with distractions should first try such techniques.

Unfortunately, for a few people, especially overburdened leaders, these techniques may not be successful. Instead, their prayer time will feel like a long string of distractions. For discouraged leaders who are painfully and constantly aware of their limitations, prayer might feel like one more task at which they are failing. Rather than entering into prayer only to be beaten by a thousand distractions, they are all the more tempted to become absorbed in their work.

THE FOURTH DWELLING PLACE

An encouraging source of instruction in these matters is Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, in particular the section on the fourth level, or dwelling place. Teresa recognizes that in prayer, there is a state in which the mind is in "rapid motion" and we cannot stop it. When the prayer time is ended, she says, "We think we are lost and have wasted the time spent before God."

But this judgment may not be true. Teresa suggests that there may be more going on during this unique time of prayer than one may recognize. She

makes a distinction between what is occurring in the mind and what is happening in the soul. She knows that this prayer may feel like the "mind is suffering from a thousand wild and poisonous beasts." However, "the soul is perhaps completely joined with Him in the dwelling places very close to the center." The conscious experience is one of complete distraction, but the inner self is joined to God.

Teresa tells us that people in this state may become disturbed by the distractions, as she herself apparently did until her spiritual director helped her to understand the truth about her prayer. She also noted that people in this state may be tempted to abandon prayer.

Of course, it is important to distinguish a completely distracted state of attempted prayer from the deeper experience to which Teresa refers. An important difference is that persons in this unique state have no desire to return to active meditation techniques, nor do they find such techniques helpful. People who are simply distracted may have success with such active prayer techniques as prayerful reading of scriptural passages, repeating a spiritual prayer phrase, or using rote prayers. But those in the state of "distracted, fruitful prayer" have no desire to engage in an active meditation. Rather, they feel called to sit quietly and endure the trials of their distracted silent prayer.

Such persons should attempt to discern whether or not their distracted prayer is truly how God is calling them to pray. If they are indeed being called to this type of prayer, they will discern signs of grace resulting from the prayer time itself. There are several important signs that one's prayer has been a fruitful time of nourishment. Some of these signs include leaving the prayer time feeling:

Energized. An unfruitful time of prayer will be dissipating and leave the person tired. As Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote in his *Summa Theologiae*, "It is becoming that prayer should last only so long as is useful for arousing the fervor of interior desire; but when it goes beyond this measure, so that it cannot last without tedium, prayer is not to be stretched out." On the other hand, if the person in prayer feels refreshed and energized at the end, it is more than likely that the inner self has been united with God for at least part of the prayer period.

Filled with inner calm and peace. A completely distracted experience pulls apart the human spirit and leaves the person agitated. But when the deepest self is united with God, the person feels a sense of inner calm and peace, regardless of how the conscious mind is distracted. Ending prayer with a sense of in-

ner rest and a feeling of being centered is a good indication that God has touched the person in a hidden part of the human spirit.

Positive. Without the presence of the Spirit, those in leadership can sometimes sink into discouragement. When we are united to the Spirit, we are filled with Christian optimism and hope, which are so important for ministry. In prayer we are regenerated and renewed by God's presence.

Inspired. A true prayer will occasionally bring us inspired thoughts and feelings. We might have a desire to reach out to a hurting employee, or a new project might come to mind. We might have a spiritual insight or simply end the prayer with a feeling of thanksgiving. In a fruitful time of prayer, God often inspires us.

These are just a few examples of ways to discern that one's time of prayer, although thoroughly distracted, may actually be a time of grace. The assistance of an experienced spiritual director may be helpful in this discernment. Each person, it is hoped, will come to recognize his or her own signs that God's Spirit has been active during times of prayer.

For leaders struggling with conflicts and problems that surface during prayer, it is important to discern if God is calling them to bring those problems to prayer. While divinely inspired solutions may not be forthcoming, God sometimes inspires us to see problems from the divine perspective. At other times, God simply lets us know that we are not alone in the struggle. While the presence of distractions is sometimes God calling us to bring problems to prayer, distracted leaders deal with a flood of problems every day; they cannot all be brought to prayer.

Each day, when their time of prayer has ended, distracted persons may feel pleased to cease the apparent struggle and glad to resume their administrative duties. However, when they reflect on their experience of prayer over a long period of time, they may come to realize how central their daily prayer time is, despite its seeming aridity and uselessness. Many burdened leaders have a deep awareness that without it, they would lose their inner strength and direction.

SOME SUGGESTED STEPS

For the burdened leader whose prayer, although fruitful, feels like a long series of distractions, the following steps may be helpful:

Stop fighting it. If you struggle with the distractions directly and continue to castigate yourself for prayer

It is hard to think of oneself as holy when one feels beaten by a thousand little distractions, many of which appear to spring from one's own vanities and fears

time wasted, you are likely only to tire yourself and make matters worse. As Saint Teresa says, "It isn't good for us to be disturbed by our thoughts, nor should we be concerned." Rather, surrender the struggle to God and remain in peace. Try not to judge yourself negatively.

Keep praying, perhaps even a bit more. Set a time and duration for prayer each day and stick to it as much as possible, without being rigidly inflexible. Archbishop Fulton Sheen, Mother Teresa, Cardinal Bernardin, and many other burdened leaders have spoken about the need for extended prayer—perhaps a daily holy hour before the Eucharist. Some individuals may find shorter periods of prayer several times each day more suited to their spiritual growth. As our lives become more hectic and burdened, the need for such time becomes greater. The aforementioned people were able to be faithful to a significant daily commitment to private prayer, despite very busy lives in ministry.

Open your eyes, at least occasionally, in prayer. This small suggestion may be helpful. When the eyes are closed, it is easier to become "lost" in a crowd of distractions. At least once in a while, distracted persons might open their eyes and thus center their minds on their surroundings. While this will not stop the incessant flood of distractions, it may offer a brief respite.

Give thanks to God. It is easy to give thanks to God when one is a neophyte and consolations are plentiful. But it is a sign of spiritual maturity to give thanks

to God when the sweetness is gone. It is then that we thank God for who God is rather than what God does for us. A pure sense of gratitude opens up the heart to God's abundant light and joy.

Be patient.

A HUMBLER PRAYER

It is a spiritual irony that, as John of the Cross tells us, neophytes often have feelings of their own holiness and are quick to judge others who do not measure up to their standards. On the other hand, the spiritually mature struggle with distractions and are heavily laden in their ministries. It is hard to think of oneself as holy when one feels beaten by a thousand little distractions, many of which appear to spring from one's own vanities and fears.

However, in some ways, distracted but fruitful prayer is more satisfying than the consolations of beginners. Early consolations may eventually begin to feel somewhat ephemeral—passing joys that do not remain permanently in the heart. Ultimately, there is something hollow and not completely “solid” about these moments. Saint Paul tells us, “I fed you with milk, and did not give you solid food because you were not ready for it” (2Cor. 3:2). When these moments begin to feel dissatisfying, it is probably a call to move to a more mature form of prayer.

In their distraction, the spiritually mature become aware of their own weakness and need for God. Their prayer becomes humbler and expresses more aptly the truth about themselves as limited and frail creatures. A humble prayer, although more difficult, is also more satisfying to the human heart; it is solid food.

At the same time, these humble persons at prayer are less burdened by themselves—less burdened by the need to keep up false pretenses and unreal images. It takes much psychic energy to maintain such masks. As people age, they are more able to live without them and are relieved to let them go.

As they continue along the spiritual path, the spiritually mature may confront many trials, conflicts, and hours of distracted prayer. But there slowly grows within the heart a sense of God's approach; like

a long-remembered voice in the distance, it moves closer with each passing year. The many distractions are only a hazy fog that eventually lifts to reveal the face of the One whose voice we recognize. Then we will say, “I knew it was you. Always, it was your distant voice I heard and your presence that I knew.”

A Concluding Prayer

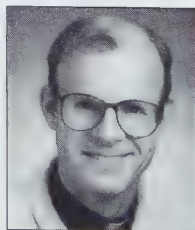
O God, I wasted another hour of prayer. My body sat before you, but my mind was mired in a host of countless details, conflicts, and nagging doubts. I would like to tell you that tomorrow I will be different. To be honest with you, we both know I won't be. Maybe if I were a holier person, I would pray better. But I am not. I remember a day, many years ago, when it seemed that I did pray well. I was on fire with zeal for you then. Today, this is all I can muster. I hope it is enough. I am grateful to you. I thank you. I do love you in my own arid way. And I am looking forward to being with you very soon.

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Father Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min., is president and chief executive officer of Saint Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland. An author of numerous books and articles, he has lectured and conducted workshops on spirituality, sexuality, and mental health throughout the world.

Women's Discernment

Reverend Joseph Boland

Any man claiming to understand women is asking for trouble, and I want to make it clear from the beginning that I make no such claim. In recent years, though, I have directed about thirty people through the Exercises in Daily Life here in the parish, and roughly two thirds of those people have been women. Also, I provide ongoing spiritual direction for a number of women. In this parish we have a Separated and Divorced Group too, and women in this group often say they think of me as an honorary woman. The reader can decide for himself or herself whether that is a compliment or not; personally, I can never make up my mind. I usually give myself the benefit of the doubt, though, and it is in that spirit that I offer the following observations, based on what I think I have seen in the lives of a number of women over the years.

At one level, of course, the whole question of women and spiritual discernment is a flawed one because it lumps together millions of individuals, each with unique lives and experiences, and somehow suggests that because they are female, they are the same. Clearly, this is not true. And yet there are, I think, shared patterns to be observed in the midst of our unique experiences, without which we would have nothing in common. These patterns enable us to relate to each other and, in the end, make discernment pos-

sible—and it is only at this level that we can talk about discernment as it applies to women as a group. What I see as true for women is true for many men too, and not true for all women, but I have found it sufficiently true for enough women to constitute a pattern. The pattern itself is simple: It is one of desolation leading to consolation, leading to further desolation disguised as consolation, leading to true consolation. I shall try to describe here the particular forms this takes.

INITIAL DESOLATION

The initial desolation takes the form of a profound lie that women have been told and that they also tell themselves. It is, in fact, the great lie—the original lie from the one whom scripture calls the father of lies—and in one of its most common guises it tells many ordinary women that the whole purpose of their lives is to be the servants of others. Given the cultural and historical background of many women (and men) and the romantic notions of marriage and love with which we still grow up, this lie is all too easily swallowed. It is made even more palatable because it sounds remarkably like what Jesus says in the gospel. But, of course, it is poisoned, and in time the symptoms begin to appear. In my experience, they often surface in the confessions of good women who

It is in the area of sexuality that the deepest stirrings of God are felt by many women today, and it can be the most risky and difficult of all

confess to having been angry and irritable. They have been told that anger is a sin, and so they are unable to hear what the anger is saying: that they are sick and tired of being everyone's doormat, fed up with being someone's wife or someone's mother. But by now the poison is all through the system, and many women are just unable, unwilling, or afraid to believe that this anger may be the first sign of new life—the beginning of consolation. I think I have seen women deliberately turn away from this truth because they can see the potential it has to seriously disrupt their marriages. I think, too, that I have seen husbands actively prevent their wives from taking steps that they too know would have potentially devastating consequences for themselves and their way of life. And so the lie continues. So too does the anger—but underground, causing other damage, such as long-term unhappiness and depression. For some, however, life beckons.

EXPERIENCE OF CONSOLATION

The fundamental movement of God being experienced in the midst of the anger is a movement toward freedom. This is hardly surprising, since it could be said to be the fundamental movement at the heart of all consolation. God is always setting his people free, and I see him doing this today in a special way in the lives of many ordinary women in the parish. But it is not easy for them to trust this movement. These are not women who have a theoretical knowledge of the spiritual tradition; they do not join groups or read feminist literature, and rarely if ever enter contexts in which such things are discussed and encouragement

may be had. Like Mary, they experience the movement of God gently within themselves in the obscurity of Nazareth and have to decide whether to trust it or not. This is made more difficult by the many voices outside themselves telling them something different from what the Spirit is saying, not the least of these being the voices of religion and the church. But for those who can trust, the message is profound and liberating. It tells them that they exist not just for others but also for themselves and that God is calling them to live their lives to the full. God has dreams for them and invites them to embrace those dreams like the woman in the gospel who had spent years bent double and could now stand tall. As they do so, all sorts of things begin to happen, three of which I will describe briefly.

GROWTH IN SPIRITUALITY

The general growth in spirituality evident in the church today is clearly one of the great signs of our times, and it is far from happening only to women. I am constantly encouraged by the developments I see in men, and I have noticed over the past year that there are quite often more men than women at parish events. Though numbers are not normally a good indicator, in this case I think they are significant. But at the same time, the growth taking place in women is marked, and quite often it is they who prepare the way for men. In a number of families I know, the wife has had to travel for a while alone while the husband has looked on suspiciously and even critically, not understanding what is going on and fearful in some way that his wife is growing away from him. In some cases this has made the woman draw back, but in others she has persevered in trust and so enabled her husband in turn to move toward deeper and more mature faith. For me, this feels so much like God, and it strikes me that maybe women religious do this in some way for the whole church.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

As women experience the liberating touch of God, one of the most common things that emerges is a desire to return to education in some form. It often arises out of a sense of opportunities missed or potential unfulfilled during the years spent caring for children. This may be accompanied by resentment (which we shall consider later), but often it is just the sense that the time has come to do something new. There are those for whom the step is too much and the idea is put off, sometimes forever, but for others a journey begins. It reminds me of the years Saint Ignatius spent reeducating himself; many women

show just as much commitment and perseverance as he did. I have watched with amazement as women have returned to school while continuing to look after a family. At times they come close to giving in, but somehow they know that what they are doing is right and that it holds out the promise of life to them. It is of God—a God who desires that his children should develop the gifts and potential that he has given them.

GOD ACTIVE IN SEXUALITY

It is in the area of sexuality that I think the deepest stirrings of God are felt by many women today, and it can be the most risky and difficult of all. It hardly needs saying that history has not been kind to women sexually, and at a time when God is moving deeply in women's lives, it is inconceivable that he should not be working to correct this injustice. We may be living in a liberated, permissive age, but it is still difficult for many women, brought up with negative images of themselves and their sexuality, to trust what the Spirit is doing in them. Yet in all kinds of ways, God is calling them to embrace their sexuality and the desires and longings that are part of it. Some women discover in doing this that they have never truly chosen sex, that it has always been something done to them—and this is not a pleasant thing to discover after perhaps twenty-five years of married life. If this realization is listened to, it involves major adjustments for the women and their husbands—and once again, the temptation is to avoid the challenge in the interest of keeping the peace or out of fear of what it could do to the marriage. More than once, when these issues have arisen during the Spiritual Exercises, I have experienced this fear in myself and have been tempted to retreat into safer, shallower waters. But when I and the person concerned have remained open to what God has been doing, great good has come from it—although often after a long, painful struggle. One thing is for sure in all this, and I have seen it over and over again: God is faithful, and never does something in one half of a marriage without doing the same thing, perhaps in a different way, in the other half. After all, God's plans for us are for peace, not disaster.

CURSE OR BLESSING?

I would like to make a general point about women and discernment that has struck me many times in recent years. It has to do with the role of the menstrual cycle in the whole process. Women often describe their period as “the curse,” but it seems to me that it is also a blessing when it comes to discern-

ment. This is especially true during the Exercises in Daily Life; since they last for many months, a woman will have quite a few menstrual periods in the course of them, and with careful observation, patterns can emerge. The tendency is for a woman to dismiss certain feelings because “I am having my period and I am not myself this week.” But, of course, she *is* herself. What she is feeling during her period may be exaggerated and out of proportion, but it exists and may very well be the key to some kind of growth that God is working to bring about.

FALSE CONSOLATION

While the fundamental movement toward freedom that spiritual directors speak of is from God, care must be taken to distinguish it from a false consolation that is desolation dressed up to look and sound like God. It seeks to take advantage of different understandings of freedom, attributing to God interpretations of the word that have nothing to do with the freedom he gives. In this way the false consolation slips in under the guise of freedom, only to cause confusion and havoc.

Its real name is not Freedom but Self, and its main weapon, once it has gained a foothold, is resentment—which itself can pass for anger if we are not careful to distinguish between the two. The difference, though, quickly becomes clear if we know what to look for. The anger which is from God leads to change, conversion, and new life. The resentment that passes for anger leads instead to bitterness—bitterness that blocks growth and holds a person in its grip, making her unable to move on. A person under the influence of this spirit spends a lot of time going over past hurts, nursing them, and throwing blame around in a way that is destructive rather than constructive for both herself and others. It can sound virtuous at times and is often both politically and theologically correct, but essentially it lacks that quality of gentleness which is characteristic of God. People under its influence have a tendency to become more and more remote from the Christian community until, in extreme cases, they lose contact with it. In the language of Ignatius, it is like water dropping on a stone.

This movement has one other distinctive quality that shows it up as not of God, and that is the unreal, illusory nature of it. It is as if the clock can somehow be put back—as if half a lifetime can be written off so one can start again from scratch. This illusion is perhaps most common among men who deal with the questions of midlife by giving up all their responsibilities and running off with a woman young enough to be their daughter. But this illusion can strike any

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crimination and blame, and there is a sense of tolerance and humor in the face of life in general and men and the church in particular. There is an ability to live with tensions that are not immediately resolved but that, like some spirits in the gospel, can be dealt with only through prayer and a kind of fasting from things as we would like them to be. The preceding desolation is heavy and always serious, whereas the consolation brings a lightness and an ability to laugh and celebrate, which have the feel of God about them. I see many women around the parish who have experienced true consolation—women who continue to show a capacity to serve that is at times astonishing. But there is nothing servile about this service. It is not the fruit of the lie we began with; it is the fruit of growing freedom. It is service in imitation of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve—and I thank God for all that he has done and is doing through such women in our parishes.

of us, and sometimes during the Spiritual Exercises I have seen it slip quietly into the thoughts and prayers of women. There may, of course, be situations that call for a radical new beginning, but generally speaking, I think, the will of God for us starts from where we are now, not from where we were twenty-five years ago.

CONSOLATION RETURNS

Once this desolation has been identified and recognized for what it is, true consolation can return. It does not live in the past but looks to the present and the immediate future in a way that is positive, hopeful, and faith-filled. There is no time wasted on re-



Father Joseph Boland is a parish priest at Saint Matthew's Parish in Kilmarnock, Scotland. His ministry includes conducting the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius and teaching the Diocesan Prayer Guides Course.

A Power of Images

James Torrens, S.J.

Father-Mother Vishvamata

One and the other half of deity,
nude, in an embrace. He
a dark blue, babyface
creased with smiling. She
a light golden, her back
to us, legs spreading,
trace of a g-string
and one breast displayed.
What a multiplicity of arms,
hers six and his twenty-four,
wielding, threatening,
and two holding on.

A first look made my eyes big,
a second brought me calm.

Do they hang these in monasteries?
And they do not disturb?

Images affect us, sometimes profoundly. I have just had some object lessons. Last weekend I accompanied a Jesuit art historian to two shows in New York City. The Pierpont Morgan Library, to begin there, has mounted a display of its manuscript

treasures from the years 1250 to 1550, mostly French, that belong in the category of books of hours.

Books of hours were devotional books in Latin for laity of some means and education. They imitated, in briefer format, the Divine Office of the monasteries. The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary formed the core of these volumes, with psalms, hymn verses, and readings. The books, thick but not large, could also include a calendar of feasts, the seven penitential psalms, the Office of the Dead, gospel readings, and devotions to the Passion of Our Lord.

The finest books of hours were profusely illustrated, not just with border decorations and elaborate capitals but also with images of Mary and the child Jesus, of evangelists and saints, of Our Lord's suffering and Resurrection, of deathbeds and burials. The pages were relatively small, but the painting was often delicate, even exquisite. Some of the illuminations were done by notable late medieval painters—Jean Colombe, Jean Fouquet, Maître François of Paris. Other illuminators are called simply the Master of a particular Gospel or Book of Hours—in other words, they are known by their most striking work. The owners of these prayer books were meant to be helped by the images and to return to them with pleasure. The effect they leave on us now is the same: intimately devotional.

The day preceding the Morgan visit, my companion and I had viewed work of roughly the same era yet

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worlds apart, at an exhibition of the Asia Society entitled "Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment." A mandala, as the Society describes it, is "an ancient Hindu and Buddhist graphic symbol of the universe that functions as a powerful aid to meditation. [It is] a blueprint or cosmogram for achieving the perfect self in Buddhist religious practice." The galleries at the Asia Society have several dozen hanging mandalas—ink and oblique watercolors on cloth, with the central figure of a deity (for example the popular feminine deity Green Tara). Invariably, the central figure is represented, in diverse activity, in small bubbles and panels all around the middle space. We need a magnifying glass to make out much in these smaller scenes. One may indeed sum up this profusion with the colloquialism "a power of images."

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a large circular mandala, perhaps five feet in diameter, flat on a table—a Kalachakra Sand Mandala. It is, in two dimensions, a way to visualize, as meditation must always do, the five-story palace of the deity Kalachakra ("Wheel of Time"). A video screen nearby displays a computer-generated version of the palace in three-dimensions; there is also a small model of this palace on the gallery floor.

Two Tibetan monks spent seventeen days chanting and sprinkling brightly dyed sands in the intricate

patterns that compose this design—squares within circles, plus a lotus in the middle, and tiny suggestions everywhere of the 727 "deities" representing the enlightened qualities of Kalachakra. On January 4 the monks will return to stir up the sands and thus scramble all their painstaking work. Then, in procession, they will go out into the city to deposit the sand. What a humble rite of closure for an artist!

The October 13 issue of *Time* magazine featured the cover story "Buddhism in America," which laid out the religion (or philosophy—likely it's both) for readers. Buddhism, the authors say, has three main regional forms. "By far the most colorful," we are told, is "Vajrayana, the 'Diamond Vehicle' adopted in Tibet in the 7th century. . . . Its incorporation of Tibet's gods and demons was especially dramatic, resulting in what [author Rick] Fields describes as 'a baroque exuberance.'"

I kept thinking all weekend how much more blessedly simple is Christianity than all this Tibetan "exuberance." Tibetans agree: they find Christianity simplistic. Still, the Baroque was a very Catholic movement, and the sand mandala reminded me of Saint Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, with its seven mansions for the various stages of prayer. In 1981–82 the artist Gordon Wagner constructed a detailed mock-up of the seven-story castle. I know this model only through photos and explanatory matter that he and his wife, Virginia, included in their pamphlet "The Castle of the Seven Dwelling Places." A striking act of piety, not unlike that of the Tibetan monks!

I have to confess here that the one mandala at the Asia Society that struck me most and came away in my imagination depicted a Father-Mother deity, Vishvamata—two bodies in a marital embrace. The Tibetans adopted from Hinduism this graphic icon of the generative power reigning in the cosmos. They seem, in the way this mandala handles the divine intimacy, to place Eros within the horizon of meanings pointed out by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: "awe-inspiring visions of peace, tenderness and benevolence."

The Pierpont Morgan exhibition, by contrast, does not exemplify any of this sexual frankness in a religious context. The religions of the book have avoided it, though Renaissance art edged into it. Judaism and Islam long ago ruled against representation of the divine, partly because of the distortion in the fertility cults—and also, of course, to drive home the belief that God is spirit and much greater than our conceptions or experience. The Father-Mother mandala would be shocking to devout Muslims today. We Christians, with our persuasion about God coming in the flesh, in Jesus Christ, have emphasized the teaching of agape—love motivated not by desire but by generosity and self-sacrifice.

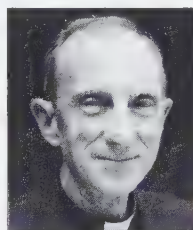
In moral teaching, Catholics have certainly not overlooked the domineering and chaotic power of Eros, have not been naive about sexual impulse. But perhaps we have not so well imagined its right condition and order, crucial as that is to happiness. In an earlier day—not too long ago—we censored sexual thoughts as “bad” thoughts, without much discrimination about how they might arise, or the understanding that might accompany them, or the appropriate context, to say nothing of aesthetic good sense.

Our culture at present does not help us much. The glossies and billboards specialize in suggestiveness. A little sexual steam (or a lot) is de rigueur in movies. Pornography lies ready to hand. We experience all too often the power of the image to unsettle, obsess, confuse, and otherwise diminish peace of soul.

I find Henri Nouwen an invaluable guide in this matter of images to live by, specifically in the religious context. Nouwen, who explored so many avenues in his priestly life and is sorely missed, also was one to discover the image, or icon, as guide. His book *Behind the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons* instructs us about entering the realm of the sacred through some classic Russian icons, presented in color. The best known are the Mother of God icon of Vladimir and the Holy Trinity by Rublyev—roughly contemporary with my Tibetan and French examples. Nouwen teaches us to look at them and to heed the divine as present through them.

A book of Nouwen's that I have not yet encountered but look forward to is *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. We owe it to his being overwhelmed by the larger-than-life masterpiece by Rembrandt, which resides in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia. Nouwen recounts that he sat before the painting for three days, absorbed. The eloquence of the parable is unparalleled; so also is the eloquence of this image for him.

Images shape us, truly, though not without our choosing. Look into a person's room. What hangs on the wall gives that person away; it is an interior window. May we learn to look rightly, and may our interior be well and wisely provided. “Show us your face, O Lord,” we have to pray—and add, as the Tibetans would, “help us recognize the demons.”



Father James Torrens, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.

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Diocesan Seminary Formation

George Aschenbrenner, S.J.

Most dioceses in the United States face a continuing decrease in the number of priests available for active ministry. Parishes are being combined and realigned. Priests often cover two or more parishes. Though a rapid increase in diocesan priestly candidates has occurred in some other countries, the ongoing decrease in the United States squelches any complacency. Especially for vocation directors, but also for some bishops and personnel boards, this is not a time for self-congratulation. In this article I do not recommend discouragement and frustration, though these feelings can easily seep into discussions about priestly vocations these days. Nor will I propose a definitive solution to this serious problem.

The present decreasing number of priestly candidates defies simple explanation. In some dioceses, a trickling increase stirs such avowals of hope and determination as to make one wonder about the appropriateness of such a response. A more than trickling increase in other dioceses can raise the suspicion that numbers may have been given too high a priority, beyond sufficient care for quality and discerned selectivity. Whether beauty and lack of attractiveness are in the eye of the beholder or in the reality itself—or, more likely, in the encounter of the two—right now, for many possible candidates, the diocesan priesthood is not attractive. Highly publicized scan-

dals in the priesthood, at times overplayed in the media, have understandably corroded the traditional confidence and admiration of many. Parents are much less likely to imagine or recommend priesthood for their sons. Yet most agree that we need many more qualified diocesan priests. We cannot sit idly by in the face of today's critical shortage.

The dearth of priestly vocations provokes a variety of reactions. Surely, this situation requires serious reflection and decisive response. But at a time of polarized tension in the church, this situation can itself foment its own polarization. A certain image and understanding of priestly formation, when disagreed with in a hardened and simplistic fashion, spawns a polarized and divisive reaction in a flagrantly opposite direction. At times, seminaries are catalogued according to this polarized split. Rather than resolving the problem, battle lines drawn with such determination make the scene even less attractive and the problem even more compounded.

There are other, more helpful responses. We must surely reflect and pray beyond any polarized position. We must adapt priestly training to a greater variety of candidates. And we must increase appropriate vocation promotion. But a lot more is also needed. We must look deeply into the core of our understanding of diocesan priestly vocation in the church and ap-

preciate anew the unique spirituality of the priesthood. This cuts beyond image and strategy.

In this article, my claim is that both the enormous diversity of expectation laid on diocesan priests and the present decrease of candidates are calling us to face the profound issue of identity. And identity in faith, when clearly perceived, always invokes concern about an appropriate, distinctive spirituality, without which such an identity can never catch fire and flame human hearts to an attractive presence and service in the church. Finally, I will discuss some implications of all this for spiritual formation programs in diocesan seminaries.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The daily life of a diocesan priest is not dull. Encounters of all sorts fill his day. His is surely not a job with clearly defined office hours. While he cannot be on duty twenty-four hours a day, the nature of his vocation is to be on the front line, in the midst of people living their ordinary lives. His daily home cannot be a fortified rectory “hideout” or a secluded cabin in the mountains.

Encounters of all sorts fill the priest’s day. People come with concerns about the church, their family, their work, and God—concerns they don’t bring to a doctor or lawyer. At times the priest is accused of being authoritarian and not listening; at times people want him to provide more aggressive leadership. He is on display at Eucharist daily and sometimes four or more times on a weekend. Where can he find the wisdom and devotion to know what to say and how to keep his heart in all the sacred words and holy actions that crowd his life?

His vocation is bathed in confession of all sorts. People confess and expose their hearts to him in intimate ways. At times, despite the human beauty revealed in most of these encounters, he cannot help but wonder about the therapeutic health of it all. How to be present in the midst of confession is rarely clear and certain. At the same time, the challenge of confessing his own faith and exposing his own heart and relationship with Jesus confronts him every time he preaches and, in fact, during most of his personal encounters each day. A controlled professional objectivity would be a lot safer. But deep down, he knows how this can block the genuine inspiration of his own heart and the touch of God on the people. Sometimes he feels submerged, almost to sinking, in the ugly and grimy details of the evil and suffering that drench the lives and families of his people. Fatigued and frustrated, he may begin to question, “Why do they bring all this to me?” A ceaseless suffering and dying, confessed and exposed in the midst

of the people, can have an almost daily impact: deadening and desolate.

To continue in such a vocation can seem almost impossible. Faithful and zestful service sometimes seems beyond human capability. Keeping one’s head above water is not easy, and maintaining the litesomeness needed to navigate the maelstrom of encounters can seem beyond one’s reach. Why wouldn’t a man just sizzle to burnout because of the drudgery of so much routine and repetition under the constant, voracious gaze of an expectation of almost infinite availability?

IDENTITY IN GOD

No quick, simple solution exists for the basic challenges of diocesan priestly life and ministry. No new set of pastoral skills and administrative strategy will suffice. The issue cuts deeper than any priestly image of speech, activity, and clothing, though these concerns have their own relative importance. It concerns the core issue of spiritual identity.

Only an identity profoundly rooted in God and stirred in response to a love beyond all imagining can assure faithful, zestful service in a diocesan priestly vocation—something far more attractive and compelling than sheer survival. The reality of God’s love, as revealed and proclaimed in Jesus as High Priest, must be the paramount and profound center of the priest’s identity. A priestly heart can never simply be stretched to the freedom and flexibility expected for the great diversity of priestly ministry, like a rubber band stretched almost to snapping. Rather, the priest must have as the core of his identity such a profoundly personal experience of God’s love that it can radiate such love with surprising diversity and availability in daily ministry. No realignment of teachable skills and schedules will suffice. The extraordinary diversity of service and availability required for diocesan priesthood is a serious invitation to an ever-deepening identity rooted in God. We cannot be inattentive or deaf to this invitation except at great peril to us all.

This identity in God’s love, more than our own stressful effort, can stretch our hearts beyond imagined limits. As a center of identity, that love stretches far beyond anything else and beyond our whole universe. To limit the identity of God only to what we can see, feel, and know sensually in this world is to settle for a God much too small—a God quite other than the dear Father of Jesus. In so many ways, but never more clearly or dramatically than in his Calvary experience, Jesus reveals a God whose being and love are capable of enriching every detail of our lives—precisely because they stretch way beyond the common sense and sensuality of our worldly ways. It is what the deepest and most important heart of our faith is all about.

Being identified in God's love, so beyond imagining but not beyond our experiencing in faith, makes a genuine difference in a priest's life. A whole new center of gravity is laid. But an identity shift into God never happens easily or automatically. To have his identity shifted into God, beyond himself and beyond anything he likes or dislikes of this world, is a sea change in a man's life. Such a radical change, while temporarily straining a psyche to soreness, finally fashions a soul more free, pliant, and eager for the great loving desires of God.

But a dangerous misunderstanding must be addressed. To have God as identity center beyond anything of this world never leads to a blithe obliviousness and careless indifference to our tortured, suffering world. Such an attitude seriously misunderstands both the nature of God as revealed in Jesus and the point of Jesus' love to death on Calvary. To be identified in God alone is to share in Jesus' passionate concern for every detail of our contemporary world. And so the priest—thus identified in God alone, rather than being turned away in disregard—feels a fire deep within that turns him, with passionate care, toward our world. It is the priest's own special experience of Jesus' baptismal fire: "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over!" (Luke 12:49–50).

DISTINCTIVE SPIRITUALITY

The priest's special identity in God must be enfolded in an appropriate spirituality. Although this may seem obvious, some clarifications are required.

A disembodied identity, however clearly described, is ultimately useless. When fleshed forth in an incorrect spirituality, the ideal becomes positively misleading and even destructive. The identity of the diocesan priest requires its own unique spirituality. The consecration of religious life, though not easily described in its full uniqueness, does have its own distinctive spirituality—usually built on its own unique consecration in celibacy, obedience, and poverty. In most cases, each of the multitudinous religious families has its own spirituality, rooted in the charismatic vision of founders or foundresses and discerningly developed over the years.

Within this variety of religious development, another distinction, in my opinion, can be helpful. The distinction between the monastic and active lifestyles points to a difference of spirituality not only among religious congregations but also in most Christian groups and in individualized commitments. This differentiation between the monastic and the active is

meant not to create a hard and fast division but to address two different tendencies and dynamics of grace in human hearts. In most cases, an individual or group must find the appropriate integration of these two tendencies in the Holy Spirit. This is not easily done, and when it is improperly done, it beclouds and disorients the person's or group's apostolic mission.

But the spirituality of the diocesan priesthood is based neither on religious life nor on monasticism. Though this may sound obvious today, for a variety of reasons we have not planned and acted on that clarity over the years. The presence and ministry of the diocesan priesthood has suffered as a result. At times, groups of active diocesan priests have lived together in a rather monastic lifestyle for mutual support and encouragement. Though the advantage of mutual support has been found in these groups, a fundamental confusion—almost a schizophrenia—could be felt regarding the identity of the diocesan priesthood. Despite the advantages of such an arrangement, something did not fit.

As noted earlier, the diocesan priesthood is an active apostolic presence on the front line, sharing in the lives of ordinary people. The basic contour of its lifestyle is not monastic, although in essence it must be identified in what I have elsewhere called "a monasticism of the heart." Two temptations must always be resisted: first, treating diocesan priesthood as though it were part of the consecration of religious life, and second, viewing it in a monastic fashion.

Including diocesan priesthood under religious life implies too much about life in community. This generates faulty expectations. The communitarian dimension is not essential to diocesan priesthood in the same way that it is for religious life. But this is not to say that the communitarian aspect is in no way essential to the diocesan priesthood. The issue is not whether it is essential, but how. We still have a long way to go in discovering and living an appropriate communitarian consciousness in the spirituality and ministry of the diocesan priesthood. In my opinion, the lack of appropriate communitarian consciousness remains a serious misunderstanding, with debilitating effects felt today in the ministry of diocesan priests.

Conceiving diocesan priesthood with incorrect monastic expectations creates its own confusion and can lead to another serious misunderstanding. The active scenario of diocesan ministry clashes with, and grates the gears of, an overtly monastic lifestyle and spirituality. It just doesn't work! On the other hand, because it is not monastic, people tend to view the diocesan priesthood as second-class and not seriously involved in the hard work of holiness and spirituality. This corruption can take expression in the belief that the diocesan priesthood, precisely because

it is not part of religious life and not monastic in lifestyle, has no distinctive, serious spirituality of its own. This is to gouge the heart out of any diocesan priestly vocation and dead-end it in frustrated activism. A priestly vocation that can have enormous attraction in the church today and whose need is beyond doubt is left rudderless, without its own unique spirituality. No wonder the number of candidates attracted to such a vocation and ministry has decreased.

This article is built on the belief that the diocesan priestly ideal must be as serious about holiness and spirituality as any religious order, whether monastic or active. That the identity of the diocesan priest is shaped in a profound experience of God's love alone bespeaks a kind of monasticism—a being alone with God in love. This is not a monasticism of external lifestyle and regularity. Rather, being alone in love with God is a matter of heart and depth of solitude, meant to ground and motivate a whole ministry of interaction and service. The heartfelt experience of being alone in the love of his dear Father radiated in the whole ministry of Jesus the High Priest, most especially and dramatically in his Calvary abandonment. This monasticism of the heart is the root of every Christian lifestyle. Such a monastic experience of the heart should be the special foundation for the identity and spiritual formation of the diocesan priesthood. The challenge is, and always will be, to shape and develop this spiritual seriousness according to the unique identity of the diocesan priesthood.

REORIENTATION IN FORMATION

How are candidates prepared for the core experience of God's love alone so that it may sanctify a ministry of busy service? Concern for a renewed clarity about the spiritual identity and active spirituality of the diocesan priesthood raises the question of the preparation and formation of future diocesan priests. Vatican II and the new Code of Canon Law view diocesan priestly spirituality very differently than did the Council of Trent and the Code of 1917. Since Vatican II, much experimentation has been done with the program of priestly formation. We have experimented with locale (country versus city), course of study, daily schedule, and many other things. This has not been wasted effort; we have learned a lot. And seminary programs across this country reveal a widespread diversification that is the result of this experimentation.

My caution is that making a number of necessary adaptations regarding superficial aspects without reviewing the core of diocesan priestly identity and for-

mation is doomed, in the long run, to failure. Our concern must cut to the profound heart of the matter.

If seminary formation is to plumb deep enough to lay the foundation for a lifelong identity, then nothing less than a radical reorientation of a man, down to the roots of his person and faith, is involved. In this radical realignment, the gamut of a man's motivation must be carefully examined: his likes and dislikes; his affective sensuality; his hopes, dreams, and fantasies; and so much more. This radical scrutiny is not instigated by an unwarranted suspicion and doubt of the man's priestly vocation. The concern is that the seminarian attain honest self-knowledge and have the confirming experience of finding his own unique identity in Christ crystallized, revealed, and matured in the charisms of diocesan priestly identity.

This is never an easy and obvious discovery. As difficult as such formation is meant to be, its purpose is invaluable. Gold is being tested and purified of alloy. Without the white heat of fire, the gold will not be refined and revealed in all its radiance. In this time of scarce vocations, we must avoid any false kindness that would soften the challenge by making a priestly formation program easier than it should be. The more we acknowledge the radically spiritual challenge and identity of diocesan priesthood in the church today, the more attractive such a life of service will be.

This radical reorientation at the heart of seminary formation is intended to be a great challenge for the candidate as well as for the seminary staff. Regardless of his age and the background of experience with which a man enters the priestly preparation program, he will leave a very different person. Renewed and realigned in some fundamental ways, with a new identity forged to clarity and precision, he is much more humbly confident of God's call to this special priestly service in the church.

But if this confidence and clarity is to come, the seminary conversion I speak of here must administer a sort of blood transfusion. Having breathed in the smog and fumes of the radically secular and often un-Christian values of contemporary culture for many years, the candidate, good and sincere in many ways, has coursing through his bloodstream—usually quite beyond any awareness of his own—a spirit diametrically opposed to authentic Christian ministry. A spirit of autonomy, individualism, and therapeutic comfort, as just a few examples, must be purged from the bloodstream. This is not as simple as drawing out all the contaminated blood, as from a corpse, and then pumping in a fresh supply of healthy blood. No, the operation is more subtle, delicate, and trying. Healthy strains of these humanistic values must be preserved while being transfused as part of a blood flow characterized by abandonment and docility to the Holy

Spirit. Without such transfusion and purification, priestly service will be ambiguous and misleading.

To become an attractive and informed pastoral leader, the future priest will surely need a thorough intellectual formation in faith, rooted in the long Christian tradition and vibrant with contemporary development. This intellectual formation will certainly play an important part in the candidate's radical reorientation. But often this intellectual formation assumes too great a predominance on the agenda of a seminary program. The radical reorientation described here must push beyond the mind to the heart, where another set of habits needs to be formed to underlie and fuse with those of the mind. These habits of the heart, born of a rigorous discernment of the daily spontaneities rumbling in human consciousness, will form a deep-hearted conviction and identity, giving personal significance to the intellectual formation and an eager flexibility to share this Good News.

Once again, such a radical remaking of a man's habitual pattern of mind and heart is not easy or fun. On the other hand, neither should it seem like time wasted or time without any enjoyment. A man's deepest, truest self in Christ is being revealed, with exciting, glorious prospect for the future. In the midst of all the heat, the gold is beginning to sparkle and shine even more.

Key to laying the foundation of diocesan priestly identity and active ministry is the regular experience of extensive solitude. It is crucial for the future priest to have, in the midst of many other necessary elements, the experience of being utterly alone, with no one and nothing but one's self—and God. A depth is plumbed here to lay a foundation that will hold firm over many years. Time alone with and in God is a type of monastic experience, but not the kind that would lead the diocesan priest into a monastery. In this aloneness, a monasticism of the heart develops and shapes the profoundly personal identity in God needed continually to fan into flame in a priest's heart the fire of faith and zeal in the midst of a daily busy life.

In his book *The Way of the Heart*, Henri Nouwen speaks of this solitude as a furnace of transformation that is needed if a minister's compulsiveness is to become compassionate. Obviously, regular lengthy periods of solitude are never easy; we sweat, squirm, blister, burn in such a furnace. But reliance on a love faithful beyond all other, similar to Jesus' experience with his Father in Gethsemane and Calvary, is revealed and takes root here.

The habit of daily solitude, developed through years of formation, lays a foundation in at least two ways for future priestly ministry. First, it provides the framework for a daily experience of contemplative quiet and calm alone with God, which will an-

chor a ministry often stormy and turbulent. Second, such solitude becomes a taproot from which spring the requisite flexibility and mobility for active ministry, as it gives birth to a confident awareness of intimate companionship with Jesus lovingly collaborating in all. The fundamental importance of solitude and the radical reorientation it entails can hardly be overstressed. Without solitude, effective and dependable priestly ministry is hardly possible.

The greatest challenge rising from today's dearth of vocations calls us to renewed awareness of the distinctive identity and spirituality of diocesan priesthood. This contemporary challenge has clear implications for the spirituality of diocesan priestly formation programs.

This article stands incomplete in itself. Having focused here on just a few charisms, I am aware that there is a whole complex of other charisms that fuse together into the attractive identity of diocesan priesthood. The brevity of this article precludes delineation and description of all these charisms, which are central to any formation program. In the heat of radical reorientation, it is precisely the gold of these charisms that is purified to revelation and fanned to a steady flame of readiness for priestly love and mission. Seminary formation always concludes in a glorious moment of humble awareness of God's call to follow and serve in the special priestly ministry of Jesus, whose presence still consecrates the whole people to a Spirited love and holiness.

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Father George Aschenbrenner, S.J., is director of the Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth at Wernersville, Pennsylvania. Formerly, he was for six years director of the Spiritual Formation Program at the North American College in Rome, Italy.

Experiencing God

James M. Keegan, S.J.

Although it would take more courage than prudence, our relationships might take a few surprising turns if each of us were to spend an hour a year asking some friends to name the five words we say most often and what they think we mean by them. If a word or phrase comes up more than twice a day, we may need to think about whether it really has meaning anymore or has instead become a kind of “harumph,” a way of filling the silence while our brain pauses for a moment to see what else is in there. One of the words in the argot of spiritual directors is *experience*, an important-sounding word that gets even more complicated when we speak of experiencing God.

When asked what they mean by “an experience,” people tend to think that it should be obvious; they shouldn’t need to explain. Attempts at responses, however, often show how difficult it is to reflect on our lives and our language. In explaining an experience, especially a religious experience, you might say that something has been done either by you or to you—a concrete event has occurred in time and space. It might be easier to say what the experience was not: not an idea or a concept or a mood or a feeling or a memory (although those things can all be parts of an experience).

This article examines what is meant by experience and what makes an experience religious. These

reflections are intended to encourage praying people to pay closer attention to the inner events of their relationship with God, and spiritual directors to look more specifically at how they help others to pray.

NATURE OF EXPERIENCE

Human experience is probably the most complex reality on this planet. The discovery of the unconscious in the last hundred years has transformed our understanding of the way we approach even the simplest objects in our lives. We cannot expect any two people to experience the same thing in just the same way. Our personal and cultural histories have so shaped the lenses through which we view the world that it is tempting to ask whether we ever see anything but our own projections. At the same time, certain human realities remain: we are flesh and bone, bodily creatures. We are also creatures of an inner world—spirit, mind, psyche—that is affected by what is outside of us and that in turn shapes the way we deal with life. Yet despite the complexity and variety of human experience, it always has three basic elements: perception, reaction, and results. As we look at these elements, we will see that experience is more an encounter between a person and some reality than it is something that happens to an individual. There

are always two involved, even if the other is some inner reality. Experience is relational at heart.

Perception. Thomas Aquinas, going back to Aristotle, founded his theory of knowledge on the premise that there is nothing in our intellects that does not get there through our senses. Even with modern research into parapsychological phenomena, Aquinas's dictum stands the test of the ages. Without our five senses we would not know anything. If we were deprived of our senses, our inner life would still take shape around them: forms, echoes, even emptiness are things we comprehend only because we have some sensory feel for them, even if only by contrast. Ideas are about things we perceive sensibly; abstractions are speculations about things. We are capable of important hypotheses and generalizations as well as soaring journeys of the mind, but they all start with something we have perceived with our senses.

The first component of human experience, then, is perception of something: seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting it. I may notice that the maple tree in my front yard has turned scarlet in the last few days, and my attention may have been called to it by the sound of its drying leaves rustling in the wind or by the musty scent of autumn in that same wind. The chill of the air or the acrid smell of burning leaves may evoke my experience of autumn this day.

Reaction. Perceiving something is not a passive act. I have reactions, willingly or not, when I perceive autumn: sensual stimuli, thoughts, memories, fantasies, images—and, under them all, feelings that may seem to swarm or jangle or rise like a peaceful mist within me. Perhaps I was initially captivated by the play of sun and wind in the colors of the tree; then I noticed how the wind kept showing me the undersides of the leaves as well as their shinier tops, and felt moved almost to tears at the splendid variety dancing before me. Perhaps the look of the tree against the blue fall sky has stirred thoughts of an earlier autumn and a certain friend, whom I recall with a mixture of sadness and joy. No wonder we tend to speak of experience vaguely; it can be a hodgepodge of inner and outer events that seem to have no beginning and can lead us to the moon.

An experience is thus an encounter, rooted in the senses, that raises reactions in me that are not confined just to my senses. They enfold the rest of me too—my mind, memory, imagination, and emotions. I perceive something and I react.

Results. Encounters like this do not simply occur. They also have results, and significant encounters can have a profound impact on our lives. At its simplest,

every feeling involves a physiological change: my hair stands on end, my eyes dilate, my pulse starts racing, I feel a chill. If I am afraid, my thoughts and desires begin to move me away from what I have just stumbled upon. If I am angry, I might move toward it.

However inconsequential or momentous, human experience inevitably changes us in some way, from slightly readjusting the ways we perceive or react, to strengthening or challenging our attitudes and behavior. Happening upon that blazing tree may have made me aware of how seldom I let myself stop just to look at things, and may even have provoked me to cancel an hour of today's less essential agenda.

What we mean by "experience," then, is an event, something that happens in what human beings know of time and space. It is concrete because I encounter it with my body, which is here and now. It is mutual because I encounter another. When I perceive something with my senses I react to it: my body, mind, and will register sensations, thoughts, feelings, and desires that say, "You have affected me." Because I have been affected, I am somehow made different. Feelings change me physiologically. Thoughts and desires may begin to move me forward or away from what I have encountered. Experience has results.

NATURE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Imagine that two different people meet with a spiritual director. The first says something like this: "When I pray I know that God is there. God is very present, and I can tell him anything that's on my mind." The second says something like this: "I had just come back from a very stimulating theology class, and when I was praying I tried to tell God how excited I felt about it. It helped me understand God better. I guess I got more enthusiastic because I went on and on when I prayed. But when I stopped to take a breath I noticed something—like a presence—as if God were leaning over, very interested in what I was saying. It really moved me that God seemed that interested in me, so I stayed there for a long time."

The first person is not describing a particular experience, as we understand the word, but making a general statement about what his or her prayer is like. Hearing it, the spiritual director would have more than a hunch that some experience has occurred during that person's prayer, but would not really know whether that person has actually prayed in the way described. Saying "I can tell God anything that's on my mind" is quite different from saying "I told God that I was delighted with the rain on my window." Spiritual directors can get into difficulty when they begin to infer or assume specifics from a directee's generalities.

The second person is speaking about an event, something that happened in a particular time and place. She noticed that God seemed to be “leaning over, very interested” in her prayer. She doesn’t describe her reaction except to say she was “moved,” but we know that something went on inside her, and we know that as a result she kept praying for “a long time.” There is a great deal more to this event than what the spiritual director is hearing her say (obvious questions spring to mind: What emotions moved her? What happened as she kept praying? What else did she notice about the “presence”?) Nevertheless, her words describe the basic elements of experience as we have described it.

In his book *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, William A. Barry develops the notion of experience as multidimensional and speaks of the religious dimension of experience. Depending on our knowledge, beliefs, biases, and other subjective qualities, we may perceive various dimensions of experience. For example, there are biological and psychological dimensions to all human experience, but not everyone perceives them. Natural historian Stephen Jay Gould has devoted much of his writing to altering the lens through which we look at our evolutionary history. In *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History*, for instance, he chronicles the discovery and interpretation of an extraordinarily important fossil bed. Because they insisted that evolution was always moving toward more complex and better-adapted species, the early workers missed what was before their eyes. The fossil record contradicted their categories, so they simply didn’t see it.

Belief that God is both transcendently Other and immanent in every created thing is the basis for this consideration of the religious dimension of experience. We believe that we can never encounter God immediately but that everything can reveal God to us. So every experience of God is also an experience of something else, like a brilliant blue sky or a verse of scripture; it is always concrete and incarnate. At the core of Judeo-Christian life is Jesus’ insistence that “the kingdom of God is among you”—or “within you,” as some translations have it. All of reality has a religious dimension in which the action of the transcendent God can be manifest. Like paleontologists, we come to it with our preconceptions and preferences. The history of religion is the story of men and women wrestling with their experience as it bumps up against their biases. The transcendent God is revealed in every created reality, and sometimes we simply don’t see it.

The person who noticed God “leaning over” perceived something of this religious dimension of experience. In this case, it happened when she was

praying, but it could occur on the bus to work or on horseback on the road to Damascus. Because it involves the action of God, who is supremely free, it is always a grace. It can be expected and desired, but it cannot be made to happen; by its nature it is personal and mutual, as we shall see. It takes two. Human beings are free to notice or not notice, to pay attention, to misinterpret, or to look elsewhere. Scripture lays out a staggering array of men and women who did not see what was happening before their eyes. They even missed the action of God in Jesus, who pointed to this religious dimension when he quoted Isaiah: “They may look and look, but never perceive; listen and listen, but never understand; to avoid changing their ways and being healed” (Mark 4:12). The work of spiritual direction is to help people to perceive the religious dimension of their experience more and more accurately, to react more authentically and to move with the action of God to make a difference in the world.

Perception. The religious dimension of experience is an interior dimension. An onlooker might see a person praying under his or her breath but have no idea what that person is experiencing. And although the praying person will probably not claim to have seen God, he or she may have observed something internally that presented itself in sensual terms. All experience, even inner experience, begins with what we sense. Despite our Thomistic legacy of trust in the senses, Catholics have stored up a harvest of suspicion of human nature and its roots in sensation. People in spiritual direction often reflect this in their haste to assure their spiritual director that they are not “hearing voices” or “seeing things,” although most of us have known the kind of inner event that can best be described in precisely those terms. We hear inner voices all the time if we are attentive to our lives, and even the most unimaginative people see the faces and mannerisms of their loved ones when they remember them. Our inner lives are probably more full of shapes, textures, flavors, aromas, and intonations than the external world we call real. While there is more to prayer than such inner sensations, they remain part of even the most abstract or empty mental activity.

Spiritual direction helps people to perceive what is there, to look within, to notice and attend to the realities of this religious dimension of life. Sometimes it doesn’t get off the ground because the director has not spent time patiently helping the directee to cultivate awareness of his or her inner landscape. Turning toward the East has convinced us that mindfulness and awareness are bedrock in the development of spiritual life.

Like the discoverers of the Burgess Shale fossils, we perceive what we want to perceive. In spiritual direction, one lays those perceptions before another and says, "Do you see what I see? Help me to look more clearly." Continued looking can change the way we perceive the religious dimension of experience, just as listening to a lot of Beethoven can alter the way we hear. The woman who said it seemed "as if God were leaning over, very interested in what I was saying" is pointing to the religious dimension of her experience. She noticed something about God, presented to her internally, mediated through the image of a person leaning over and listening. In much the same way, she might perceive her husband paying close attention to her. She would notice the look in his eyes, the tone of his questions or comments, the way he moves his body toward her, his stillness. Because she has grown to know her husband and trust him, she perceives both his attention and the love behind it. She has come to know that this is how he really is, not just an attentive facade constructed to please her. A surgeon or a police officer could look at her and listen in the same way, but she would probably perceive their behavior quite differently, depending on what she knew and believed about those individuals.

On the other hand, believing and readying ourselves for God's revelation does not ensure that we will experience it. There is something profoundly unsettling about this. In the famous story of Elijah at Horeb (1 Kings 19:9-18), the great prophet, full of thunderous feelings at the end of his lifetime, is told to "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord." He expects to encounter God but instead encounters some of the most dreadful weather imaginable: a hurricane, an earthquake, a fire. The author of the story is careful to tell us that the Lord "was not in" the hurricane, earthquake, or fire, but that when Elijah caught "a light murmuring sound," he covered his face and heard God speaking to him of his mission. Of course, God was in the hurricane, in the sense that God is immanent in all of reality. The point is that God chose to communicate with Elijah not through the violent weather but through the little sound. God is not omnipresent like radio waves, which anyone can tune in to with the right equipment, but immanent in the sense that God always desires to communicate with us. It is God's initiative, God's choice to be revealed. Experiencing God in our lives is not something we can expect simply because we expose ourselves to it, as we can expect to hear the symphony when we play the record or to encounter the tree when we climb onto it. To experience God is to encounter a Person who is at least as free as we are to speak or not.

When we perceive the religious dimension of our experience, we are perceiving a Person. Perceiving a tree or a fossil puts one into relationship with it. Perceiving God is, by its very nature, a personal relationship.

Reaction. When anything provokes our attention, we react. Feelings, thoughts, fantasies, and memories are touched off when we experience God—or even the absence of God—in our lives, but those reactions are different from noticing a tree or a fossil. They are inherently personal. If religious experience might be described as the events that make up the personal relationship between God and oneself (just as no relationship exists without concrete events), then one's reactions are part of a mutual interpersonal relationship. As in any important relationship with other human beings, we sometimes forget or overlook this essential mutuality. Religious fear or joy, insight or confusion are reactions to a Person, not simply states of being resulting from one's prayer. In praying we are sometimes satisfied simply to feel our feelings or come to insight rather than to bring these reactions consciously into relationship with God, who stimulated them in the first place—but all relationships wither without mutual communication. Curiosity was Moses' initial reaction to the burning bush (Exodus 3). When he recognized that he was being addressed not by a bush but by a Person, Moses addressed his feelings and thoughts to God. Curiosity deepened into awe, fear, shame, hesitation, obedience, and mission before Moses fully heard what God had to say.

Another young prophet, Isaiah, derived his call from just such an experience of God (Isaiah 6). As he related it, "I saw the Lord sitting on a high and lofty throne: his train filled the sanctuary." He described the seraphs who attended the Lord, the words they shouted to each other, and the way the doorposts shook at the sound. His immediate reaction was overwhelming fear and terror. But Isaiah shouted out his fear, turning his reaction into a response to God. As a result, he continued to experience God communicating, and their relationship changed. When Isaiah's guilt and fear were wiped out through the image of a seraph with a burning coal, he could hear the great desire in the heart of God: to speak salvation to the people through an earthly messenger. In revealing his reaction to God, Isaiah became more intimate with God. Both could see in each other's hearts the same desire for a future of justice, deliverance, and truth. It was because he spoke from his friendship with the Lord that Isaiah's words were prophetic.

FEELINGS DURING PRAYER

Let us look specifically at two reactions that arise constantly in the dialogue of spiritual direction. When people speak of their prayer, they often talk either about their feelings (whether they are the positive feelings aroused by “good” prayer or the negative ones, like boredom, fretfulness, and irritability, that seem to lurk around every prayer corner) or about their thoughts (whether they are reflections on what happened during prayer or on what ought to be done because of it).

Feelings. An overused term in the stockroom of spiritual direction is the question, “How do you feel about that?” For those of us with a history of highly cerebral living and praying, or whose feelings are slippery and hard to get at, being helped to “name, claim, and own” our feelings could be a helpful objective of spiritual direction. But praying people are too often left with the impression that the goal of prayer is to be more comfortable with oneself rather than to reveal oneself in a mutual relationship. In an initial experience of God like those we have described, people are often caught up in awe, fascinated with the God they perceive. But all too often, in praying after the event, people slip into a fascination with their own feelings and responses. Thus, rather than serving as a means of revealing oneself to God, prayer heightens self-absorption and introspection; its goal becomes some variety of personal liberation, healing, or insight into one’s life. Although these are positive goals, focusing on them makes us overlook the other Person involved and the possibility of friendship between us. Too often and too easily directors ask, “How did you feel?” when they might instead ask, “Whom did you see?”

Moses’ feelings in the story of the burning bush are strong and clearly stated. But most of the story, which comprises almost forty verses of scripture, is about God—God’s awareness of the sufferings of Israel, God’s revelation of the Divine Name, God’s desire to send Moses to Pharaoh, even God’s anger with Moses. The man is fascinated with the God he perceives—and terrified, humiliated, and awestruck. Moses’ efforts to communicate these reactions to God are integral to his experience because they help him perceive God more clearly. If a spiritual director had asked Moses to talk only about how he felt, Moses might have been led to ignore what he had perceived and had all those feelings about—namely, God.

Thinking. In some circles “mental prayer,” intellection, and other headwork are enjoying the negative press they may deserve after their years of dry dominance,

while affectivity is emerging as the omega point toward which “real prayer” moves. But it is important to remember that we do react intellectually as well as affectively to what we perceive; thoughts can become part of our self-revelation to God. We can tell God what we are thinking or imagining, or we can close down and think alone.

Ignatius of Loyola, whose Spiritual Exercises have provided the church with a paradigm of prayer and spiritual direction, has a puzzling reputation. Some see Ignatian prayer as intellectual and discursive, while for others it is all imagination and feeling. In fact, the Spiritual Exercises are all of those things, and they can help us understand the place of a person’s thinking reaction in religious experience and prayer.

Sometimes Ignatius presents a series of meditations that urge one to do more thinking and reflecting than imagining and feeling. The latter activities are the hallmarks of what he calls contemplations. When meditating, one consciously uses the Three Powers of the Soul—memory, intellect, and will. One might bring to memory, for instance, the sin of Adam and Eve, bring it to the intellect by mulling it over internally, and finally bring it to the will, all the time comparing, reflecting, considering. A closer look at the Spiritual Exercises reveals that paradoxically, Ignatius asks for all this intellectual activity so that the person might *feel* the mystery more deeply. The goal of the meditation on the first sin, for example, is “shame and confusion at myself.” At the same time, a goal of the contemplations, in which imagination and feeling seem to take precedence over thought and reflection, is *knowledge*. The exercitant asks for a deeper inner knowledge of the Lord in order to love and follow him. What’s going on here? Is this affective prayer, intellectual prayer, or what?

Simply, this is relational prayer. The heart of Ignatian prayer is neither the contemplation nor the meditation, although both are useful tools when they can help. The heart is what Ignatius calls the colloquy, an element of prayer that he never omits. Ignatius insists that before finishing each session of prayer, one should speak with God, Jesus, or Mary about what has happened during that time. One should talk with God as a friend would speak to a friend, or a servant to a master—whatever relationship corresponds to the present relationship between the exercitant and God. One has no real idea of the worth of one’s thoughts and reflections, or of the feelings they arouse, until God has responded in some way. In any relationship, sharing one’s ideas and feelings with another enables both parties to know, love, and be with one another.

A personal story may illustrate how thoughts can take us away from the experience of God and how,

with help, they might bring us back to it. Once, during a retreat, I was enjoying a particularly engaging week of prayer, caught up with Jesus and his response to the throngs of people in the gospel of Mark. Increasingly, I discovered in the crowds men and women from my own life, including some very needy ones, such as the alcoholic street people who were always at our back door, asking for a sandwich or a handout. I felt sorrow and pity and a desire to introduce them to Jesus, who could, after all, be a big help to them. Before long a little plan had hatched itself in the swamps of my mind: when the retreat finished I could begin to work on getting them to pray with me, as well as to eat our food and get into detox. The backyard was full of imaginary drunks whose lives were turning around before I noticed that my prayer had become dry and plodding and interminable, and I was perplexed. When my director, a wise and simple man, asked, "What happened to Jesus?" it all came clear in a flash. Jesus had been no part of my plan for this mission of mercy. My thoughts had carried me off to a land where grandiosity disguised itself as compassion, and I had forgotten the Person who is the source of reality. Like the seventy-two disciples in Luke's gospel (10:17–20), I needed to return to Jesus, tell him what happened, and learn again that relationship with God is the heart of ministry and the reason for rejoicing. I learned a good deal about my messianic compulsiveness in the humiliating return.

My director helped me use my head to discover how to get back to the Person I had abandoned. Whether feelings about myself gave rise to my thoughts and projects or the other way around, I needed to relate what was happening to Jesus. With more time my director could have helped me to mull over my grandiosity and the broadly lit boulevards down which I habitually wandered, away from truth and real relationship. Instead he chose to help me reflect on how I was acting in the central relationship of my life.

Results. There are many today who claim to have religious experiences. In a world fractured by political and racial wars disguised as religious ones, in which God is used to justify "holy" wars on the one hand and white supremacy on the other, discussion of the veracity of religious experience seems imperative. Religious experience, however, does not validate itself. Just because it sounds like God and feels like God and reminds me of the best things we know about God, I cannot say with certainty, "This is God."

While we ought to maintain a healthy skepticism about anyone's claim to have experienced God, it is important for us as praying people, and as spiritual

directors who are trying to help others pray, to approach such events with openness and expectation. Unless we give raw experience a chance, we will be discouraged from ever attending to the ways God desires to break into our lives and may never bring to harvest the genuine fruits of the Spirit. Furthermore, we may be deprived—or may deprive others—of the joys of living in a conscious and developing relationship with God.

Religious experience has effects in a person's life, and it is only when the fruits are known, often years later, that one can say with any surety, "God was in this place!" Those fruits, described by Paul in Galatians (5:22), allow us to see that God was indeed in our experience, because they produce the one thing we know to be in God's heart: an inclusive community of brothers and sisters together in compassion and justice before God. This is ultimately the one action of God in our world. It is who Jesus was and what he died and rose for. If religious experience leads to living out this Paschal Mystery, then it need not prove itself more.

Are there short-term effects that make it more likely than not that one's particular experience may be of God or may lead to God? Three results of genuine religious experience may be discernible during the event or in exploring it later with a spiritual director. They revolve around the question, Is mutual self-revelation going on? Even though its long-term effects are not visible, it is possible to notice whether the relationship between oneself and God is growing or stagnant.

A first result of genuine experience of God is that God becomes a more real person for me. The history of the Judeo-Christian scriptures can be summarized as God's self-revelation. The same God desires to be known today, both for the good of the people and for God's own sake. Prefaced as they are with "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt," even the Law and the Ten Commandments are personal statements of a God who wants to be known in relationship (Exod. 20:2, Deut. 5:6). God has a personality we can recognize but never fully grasp, a personality that Christians see most clearly in the face of Jesus Christ. Before I call my experience religious, I want to ask whether it has somehow disclosed to me more of this Person of God.

While a person may become acutely aware of her gifts and shortcomings in the moment of encounter with God, she will also notice the Person of God. Real religious experience tends to make a person less self-absorbed and more engaged with the Other. It is directed, like the lover's glance, at the Beloved. It bears the seeds of selfless social commitment: one wants to know and care about what is in God's heart,

to see and feel about the world as God does. Paying attention to the God who knows and suffers with the poor is the heart of the biblical call to prophecy.

If such experience is genuinely relational, then a second effect is the person's self-revelation to God. In this sense religious experience is always to some degree confrontational. Because it places one before God, the twisted motivations and contradictions of the human heart appear more stark than usual. Moses covers his face, Isaiah says "Alas!" and more ordinary men and women know intuitively that saying "Here I am" is not saying very much. At the same time, genuine experience of God is life-giving rather than defeating, joyful rather than depressive; it leads to further revelation of oneself to God. Moses continues to tell God how inadequate he feels, and God counters with a wonderful variety of ways to say "I will be with you."

A third effect of religious experience flows from its communal nature. While such an event is intensely personal, it is never private or sequestered from the believing community. Experience of God involves a person more deeply in the real community with all its brokenness, sin, and injustice, as well as its reflections of God's glory. Whoever first said "Beware the mystic who cannot wash the dishes" knew that prayer does not exempt one from practical care for one's brothers and sisters. Before labeling an experience "religious," one might ask oneself, Has this experience made the other people in my life more or less real to me? Or has it made it easier for me to avoid sensitive issues in my relationships? This kind of challenge may come more readily from a good spiritual director than from oneself.

If they are part of God's ongoing revelation, religious experiences can be verified only in the light of what other Christians, living and dead, have come to know of God. Because Christians can be as short-sighted and selfish as anyone else, this is a difficult criterion to employ in practice: real religious experience often flies in the face of values adopted by the religious community. Still, it is not impossible to detect whether I feel that my experience is secret and mine alone, or that I need not examine and question it or bring it into dialogue with church and tradition before I act on it. While it is understandable to fear that exploration of one's prayer in spiritual direction will destroy its mystery, work with a skilled director should prove just the opposite. Bringing one's experience before another who can help discern the presence of God can make one more acutely aware of the mysterious God; even more, it links one to the Christian community through the person of the director. When God speaks in someone's life, the effect is to involve others, not as passive recipients of the message

but as active participants in the unfolding story. Religious experience moves one deeper into healthy relationships with God and God's people.

CENTRALITY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Ultimately, what concerns us most about religious experience is not its details but the development of a personal relationship with God. However strongly one may protest it, friendship cannot exist, grow, change, or develop if the friends do not encounter one another. Encounters are the test of a relationship in that they manifest what is really there. I may think warmly of a certain friend and feel happy that she is part of my life, but I find myself nervous, shy, and remote when we are together. What happens when we are together, as well as my thoughts and feelings about my friend, indicate the character and quality of the relationship.

The events and encounters of relationship give substance to one's thoughts and feelings. To know that God loves me is a very good thing. To experience God's embrace or God's persistence despite my sins is something else again. Life with God is no more abstract than life with one another, and there is more to this kind of relationship than just love. God has a personality, and a sense of humor as well as a sense of purpose; God is a real Person with independent desires and concerns. Religious experience is important for praying people because relating with God—a God who has chosen to be known in our time on this Earth, and not only in our thoughts and desires—is at the heart of life.

RECOMMENDED READING

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- Godin, A. *The Psychological Dynamics of Religious Experience*. Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1985.
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Father James M. Keegan, S.J., is associate director of the Spirituality Office of the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky. His work involves developing spiritual directors, conducting workshops, and providing individual spiritual direction.

BOOK REVIEWS

Reaching Toward God: Reflections and Exercises for Spiritual Growth by James Torrens, S.J. Kansas City, Missouri: Sheed & Ward, 1997. 156 pages. \$14.95.

Readers interested in spiritual growth owe James Torrens (and his publisher, Sheed & Ward) a great debt. In *Reaching Toward God*, Torrens has collected (in revised, expanded form) his reflective spiritual essays, written originally for HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, thus making them available to a wider audience for sustained reading and reflection. As dedicated readers of this journal know, Torrens has developed a distinctive style of reflective essay that flows from his creative gift as a poet. Each essay is preceded by one of his poems, which serves as a springboard for the reflections. Both the poems and the essays are food for the soul, revealing a man who has pondered deeply on life, on literature, and on God's ways with us humans and learned some profound lessons.

This collection consists of seven chapters, each comprising poems and essays related to a particular theme. Chapter 1, "The Pilgrim Journey," touches on issues of the journey of life—the spiritual journey, if you will—with its false starts, wanderings, joys and sorrows, pains and losses. Chapter 2, "Humility and Self-Understanding," asks the reader to reflect on issues of pride and self-esteem, love of self and of others, assertion and self-effacement. The essays in Chapter 3, "Affection, Friendship, Community," invite reflection on one's family, friends, and various communities. Chapter 4, "The Human Word and God's Word," explores the rhythm of call-and-response that constitutes the relationship between God and ourselves and asks us to examine our experience in the light of selected books of scripture. The poems and essays of Chapter 5, "Attitude to Things of This World," challenge us to examine our life in this real

world to see what might be hindering us from reaching out to God. In Chapter 6, "Living by Faith," Torrens reflects in concrete ways on how we might live our real lives by faith. Chapter 7, "Devotion," touches on the role of the Holy Spirit, who impels us to reach toward God; on the role of Mary as a model of human reaching toward God; and on a touching devotion that can help us in our own reaching. The book ends with the poem "Reaching: A Song," which sums up the theme of the volume.

Readers are encouraged to engage in suggested reflections and practices after each essay. The essays themselves are full of the wisdom of a gentle and honest man who has himself struggled to continue to reach toward God. Often, the poems and essays take off from an ordinary happening in the author's life—for example, finishing the school year, or sorting, discarding, and holding on to the accumulations of the past few years when he makes a major move from California to New York City. In other words, they invite us to reflect on our own realities in order to see where God is drawing us to reach toward him. Food for the soul on the journey of life: that's what this book provides in abundance.

—William A. Barry, S.J.

Between Fathers and Sons: A Program for Sharing Faith, Strengthening Bonds, and Growing into Manhood by Michael Smith, S.J. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1997. 125 pages. \$16.95.

Frontiers are sometimes physical borders and sometimes spiritual or even mystical boundaries. Adolescence is both. Every person has to live on both sides of it as it rolls through generation after gener-

ation. Perhaps the older and the younger in the golden past related across that rolling frontier amicably. Not today—particularly in the case of males, as the shapes and forms of fathering have disintegrated, one after another.

Commentators have given a name to this social illness: nonfeasance—the omission of an act that ought to have been performed. Fathers today are not sufficiently active in rearing their children, sons and daughters alike. And commentators have a partial cause of this illness staring up at them from their statistics: because marriage has somehow lost its bite, four of ten American children fall asleep at night in a house bereft of their biological father. Even if a father lives with his family, the pressures of gender-role shifts, work patterns, urban mobility and anonymity, the drug culture, and a lot else have contrived to turn male adolescence into a fairly wild frontier. The pressures have made the father-son relationship arguably the grittiest and tautest frontier in society.

Michael Smith, S.J., now director of the Campion Retreat Center in Melbourne, Australia, has boldly moved onto that frontier, equipped with sound psychology and solid theology. He has created a series of group spiritual exercises that bring a father and his son together not at high noon but in the cool of the evening, where God walks. He has conducted the program in the United States and in Ireland as well as in his native Australia. It works.

In *Between Fathers and Sons*, Smith outlines, as the book's subtitle states, "a program for sharing faith, strengthening bonds, and growing into manhood." The book lays out a program of six three-hour sessions, which can be completed over a weekend or spread out. Each session, grounded in an event from Jesus' life, incorporates brief input from the facilitator, individual reflection, group work, and time during which fathers and sons speak personally to each other. The topics cover the field by having the generations meet at the crossroads: the father-son relationship, becoming a man, dealing with anger and aggression, friendship with girls and women, the quest for identity. The program ends with a moving ceremony during which each father blesses his son and washes his feet.

Smith's expressed conviction is that a son must learn to believe in Jesus Christ autonomously, but that he will believe much more wisely and well if he witnesses his father's faith. Grace, we have learned, builds on nature; Smith is strengthening both grace and nature in this program for fathers and sons.

Designed for adolescent males between ages 13 and 18 and their fathers (or someone who takes the father's place when he is not available to his son), the program is an excellent resource for pastoral teams

in high schools, parishes, and retreat houses. *Between Fathers and Sons* offers much to pastoral counselors and even to groups of fathers who wish to deepen their relationships with their sons. The program's process is crisply laid out, practical, and penetrates intimate and personal issues without too much pressure or too much thrashing about. Plainly written, the text includes full directions for conducting the program and useful tear-out forms to photocopy. Facilitators do not have to belong to a helping profession to use it.

The focus of *Between Fathers and Sons* raises some tangy questions about other relationships in the family. What about mother and daughter, for instance? Does that relationship need a program? For that matter, what about mother and son? While fathers and sons enhance their mutual relationship, do they leave mother out, or do they heighten all family relationships? Most of us would probably judge that in general, mother-son and mother-daughter relationships are in better shape than father-son or father-daughter relationships. Yet daughters need their fathers as much as sons do. Perhaps therein lies Smith's next task: to apply his gifts and skills to writing a similar book for fathers and daughters.

—Joseph Tetlow, S.J.

Renewing Apostolic Religious Life by David Coghlan, S.J. Dublin, Ireland: Columba Press, 1997. 139 pp. \$12.00 (available in U.S. from 23rd Publications)

Many religious are skilled in a whole range of religion-related disciplines. They have studied scripture and liturgy; the spiritual life and moral decision making; perhaps social justice and pastoral theology and spiritual direction. All too frequently, though, they have not been exposed to the disciplines that explore the nature of human organizations, the way they are created and grow and disintegrate, and the implications of all that for leadership in organizations. When such religious are then called to positions of leadership in their apostolic community, they tend to act out of an unexamined assumption that the collective body is nothing more than the sum of its individual members. As a consequence, their energies are frequently focused on the health and well-being of each individual member—that is, if they are not consumed by the ef-

fort to care for their most difficult people, using 90 percent of their time on 10 percent of the members. The job of leading the organization can easily slide off the screen.

In this brief work, David Coghlan offers such leaders a crash course in some key concepts and constructs from the field of organizational development. For religious who have never been exposed to these ways of viewing the life of a community, the book provides a helpful service indeed. At the least, it can serve as a healthy critique of the limits of therapeutic leadership, focused only on each person in isolation from the body as a whole.

In a few short chapters, Coghlan provides succinct introductions to some of the milestones in the story of this young field. He invites the prospective religious leader to reflect on her or his preferred leadership style through the use of the Blake-Mouton leadership grid, with its two axes of concern for people and concern for results. He exposes some of the key insights of the pioneer of group dynamics, Kurt Lewin, and their further expansion in the work of the author's mentor and friend Edgar Schein. And he touches briefly on the work of Carl Rogers and the use of T-groups.

The book discusses important distinctions that religious leaders need to keep in mind. Coghlan reminds us that leadership of an organization is something quite different from management and administration. He counsels provincials to be clear about their intended outcomes before they jump into organizational interventions. His advice about being clear regarding the difference between a consultant and a facilitator could help to prevent a lot of messy situations. And his observation that it is no easy matter to generate a "sense of the province" among apostolic ministers who tend to focus only on their own individual work will win quick assent from those who have tried to lead apostolic groups. Finally, one can only encourage leaders to pay attention to his salutary distinction between the formal and informal life of the community.

It is to be expected that some of Coghlan's emphases may be challenged by leaders of apostolic communities who view leadership, membership, participation, and collegiality from a different perspective than the author. For example, although Coghlan acknowledges that leadership in the past was too autocratic and needs instead to be exercised throughout a system, the work as a whole tends to assign to the provincial (his generic term for leader) role descriptions that some apostolic communities would find too "top-down." His assertion that the provincial is '*the strategist*' (his italics) would be too bald a statement for many. That the leaders needs to make

the "arguments" for a particular change or to "convince" the team suggests a perception that the leader gets the ideas and then sells them to the rest of the community. Congregations with a much more participatory mode of consensus building would not be comfortable with such a style. The author wisely stresses that "creation and ownership of a sense of province is essential"; one might question, however, whether the selling of the leader's program will ever produce that kind of genuine ownership.

Although the title of the work refers to "renewing" religious life, a major focus of the reflection is on change. For the author, and the school of development he espouses, the word *change* refers not so much to what is happening as to the actions taken by some to transform others. The term *change-agent* is prominent in this particular approach to organizational development. Better balance would be achieved by noting that there are other valid approaches to organizational health in which organizational facilitation assists the community to discover within itself the resources to bring about whatever revitalization—or change—the body chooses to make. In using the language of *change*, *change-agent*, *denial*, and especially *dodging* of change, Coghlan runs the risk of suggesting that it might never be effective leadership to stand pat for a while and take time to integrate the changes a group may have just been through.

By this time we have edged closer to that point at which the reviewer begins to imagine the book he wishes the author had written rather than the work actually under review. Stepping back from that precipice, and using the good Ignatian practice of returning at the end to what was said at the beginning, I will close by repeating that this is a good introduction to a lot of ideas that many provincials will find valuable.

—George Wilson, S.J.

Guided by the Spirit: A Jesuit Perspective on Spiritual Direction by Frank J. Houdek, S.J. Chicago, Illinois: Loyola Press, 1996. 181 pages. \$18.95.

For several years I have supervised spiritual direction and directed retreat practica at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. I was previously a spiritual director at Jesuit Retreat House in Los Altos,

California, and at Saint Paul's College in Washington, D.C. When I first glanced through *Guided by the Spirit* by Frank Houdek, S.J., I wondered what new perspectives, if any, the author would contribute to the vast amount of spiritual guidance literature.

Clarity of expression, theological depth, and insight, strengthened by the wisdom of tested pastoral praxis, are the hallmarks of this contribution. Houdek does not reduce spiritual direction to a seven-step "how to" technique. It is a nuanced charism that is theologically informed, situated within the ministry of the Christian tradition, and further refined by the interactive chemistry of the Spirit, the directee, and the director.

Guided by the Spirit is the result of over thirty years of frontline experience. Houdek, who has served as master of novices for the Detroit Province and rector of the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley (JSTB) Jesuit Community, currently teaches historical and spiritual theology and is director of the Master of Theological Studies Program at JSTB. While this work is predominantly Ignatian in approach, the theological categories of John of the Cross and modern-day psychological perspectives enhance the scope of the book.

What makes *Guided by the Spirit* a valuable resource is the combined attention given to theological frameworks, spiritual direction models, and pastoral experience. Houdek carefully examines the spiritual direction process and the relationship between director and directee. He explores the theological foundations and boundaries needed for such a relationship to begin and progress. He also discusses the type of training and experience required for an effective ministry of spiritual direction. Throughout, Houdek maintains a reverence for the individual:

One can make no greater mistake or do no greater harm than to direct others as one directs him- or herself. Ignatius was warning us against missing the uniqueness of the person who is being directed. He wanted to make it clear that no two persons will ever profit from the same kind of direction, because God deals with each person uniquely, specifically, appropriately.

Keeping this primacy of the individual in mind, Houdek pastorally adapts theology and tradition to the developmental state of the person. The directee requires different sets of challenges, questions, and responses from the director at the beginning, purification, and proficient stages. Houdek, by keenly focusing on the directee and the interior manifestations of the Spirit, clarifies the interior signs and characteristics of these stages. Such awareness and knowledge aids the directee's daily growth in God.

Houdek also explores the critical issue of personal freedom in tension with the emotional realms of fear, anger, depression, sexuality, and authority. With sensitivity, he examines each of these areas with an experiential knowledge of their respective obstacles to personal freedom. Learned and adept, Houdek helps both the directee and director to understand and address the emotional zones of each person. Spiritual freedom, he shows, begins with naming one's dominant and secondary emotions in order that one may properly identify one's issues, own them, and respond to them in creative ways. Finally, the sections on prayer, dark night of the senses, transference, and countertransference are treated with singular depth.

Guided by the Spirit commends itself to many audiences. It is an apt book for anyone considering or beginning spiritual direction. For those mature in spiritual direction or engaged in pastoral ministries, it provides a nourishing refreshment for individual reflection or group work. Used as a required text or for ministry training purposes, this book will stretch and enrich the theological frameworks and pastoral question of the reader.

—John Mossi, S.J.

Corporate Therapy and Consulting by Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D. New York, New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1996. 241 pages. \$27.95.

It is very common, in my experience, for people who are trained and skilled in one-on-one counseling or therapy to be invited to extend their helping role to groups and organizations. This occurs for psychiatrists and therapists of all conceptual orientations. In such situations, the therapists or counselors are challenged to extend both their knowledge base and their skills to working with systems more complex than the individual. This book addresses such extension of knowledge and skills. The author, Len Sperry—a frequent contributor to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT of insightful articles on organizational dynamics—is himself a psychiatrist as well as an organizational psychologist. The book “provides clinicians with an overview of the corporate therapy and consultation processes and a basis for expanding clinical skills to organizational settings.” It is targeted at clinicians and mental health professionals, graduate students and trainees in clinical and organizational training programs.

The volume is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the notion of clinical organizational consulting by comparing it with organizational interventions (as typically practiced by organizational development consultants) and with clinical interventions as practiced by psychiatrists and therapists. Just as organizational development consultants tend not to have clinical skills, clinicians tend not to have organizational skills. In this chapter, Sperry both draws on and echoes Harry Levinson's classic book *Organizational Diagnosis*, the major work in this field. Chapter 2, a central chapter of the book, focuses on the extension of knowledge and skills for clinicians. This requires a change in thinking, levels of involvement, knowledge, and skill base. Clinicians move from seeing people in their own offices for fifty-minute periods to meeting clients in their work sites and attending meetings—what Nevis refers to as a change from “working by sitting down” to “working by walking about.” Clinicians have to unlearn their tendency to focus on intrapsychic dynamics and pathology diagnosis and learn to focus on organizational issues involving strategy, structure, relationships, and so on. At the same time, they must learn to translate and extend their clinical expertise, whether it be in psychodynamics, cognitive or behavioral therapy or family systems. Chapter 3 presents an introduction to organizational models, much of which would be found in standard organizational textbooks. Chapter 4, another central chapter in the book, deals with organizational diagnosis. Sperry refers to his diagnostic model in terms of 4 Ss: situation and stressors, stage of organization, subsystem, and synchronism/fit. He poses a series of questions under each heading, aimed at producing relevant information. He also focuses on the diagnostic impression that would be forming in the mind of the clinician and draws on the well-established work of Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in naming focal targets: power/authority, morale/cohesion, norms/standards, goals/objectives, and roles/communication. An appendix to Chapter 4 presents a taxonomy of organizational and work dysfunctions as a series of disorders. Chapter 5 outlines organizational interventions practiced by OD consultants working with individuals, teams, and organizations. Chapter

6 complements Chapter 5 by presenting clinical-organizational interventions for individuals, teams, and organizations. Chapter 7 focuses on executive dynamics and the personality and behavioral styles of executives, while Chapter 8 addresses consulting, psychotherapy, and coaching work with executives. Case examples are provided in Chapter 8, and the differences and similarities between consulting, psychotherapy, and coaching are explored. Finally, Chapter 9 discusses consulting with health care organizations and provides case examples.

I think this is quite an important book. As I said at the outset, clinicians are frequently asked to work with groups and organizations, and so are challenged to extend their assumptions, knowledge base, and skills. This book provides an introduction to such an extension. It does not go into the same amount of systematic detail on diagnosis as its classic predecessor, Levinson's *Organizational Diagnosis*. It does provide a great deal of what Levinson omits, such as organizational frameworks and the focus on the clinician's personal learning.

I am disappointed, however, that the application of personality disorders to organizational settings is not addressed more extensively. There is a passing reference to other publications by Sperry that describe how obsessive-compulsive, passive-aggressive, and paranoid personality styles, for example, affect teams and organizations. I expected this book to say much more about that and to actually provide accounts of clinical work in teams where there is evidence of disordered personality behavior. Another shortcoming is that case examples do not appear until chapters 8 and 9. I am also disappointed that health care organizations are presented as the only alternative to commercial enterprises. There is no discussion of educational, voluntary, or church organizations. The absence of a concluding or integrating chapter is a definite lack.

For readers with clinical training, this book provides an introduction to extending their work to organizational settings. For those who are not clinicians, the book offers an introduction to clinical perspectives and orientations that can foster awareness of their own learning needs.

—David Coghlan, S.J.

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For more information, please contact:

James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Director
The Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality
8901 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20903

Phone: (301) 422-5500
Fax: (301) 422-5519
E-mail: jesedcntr@aol.com

